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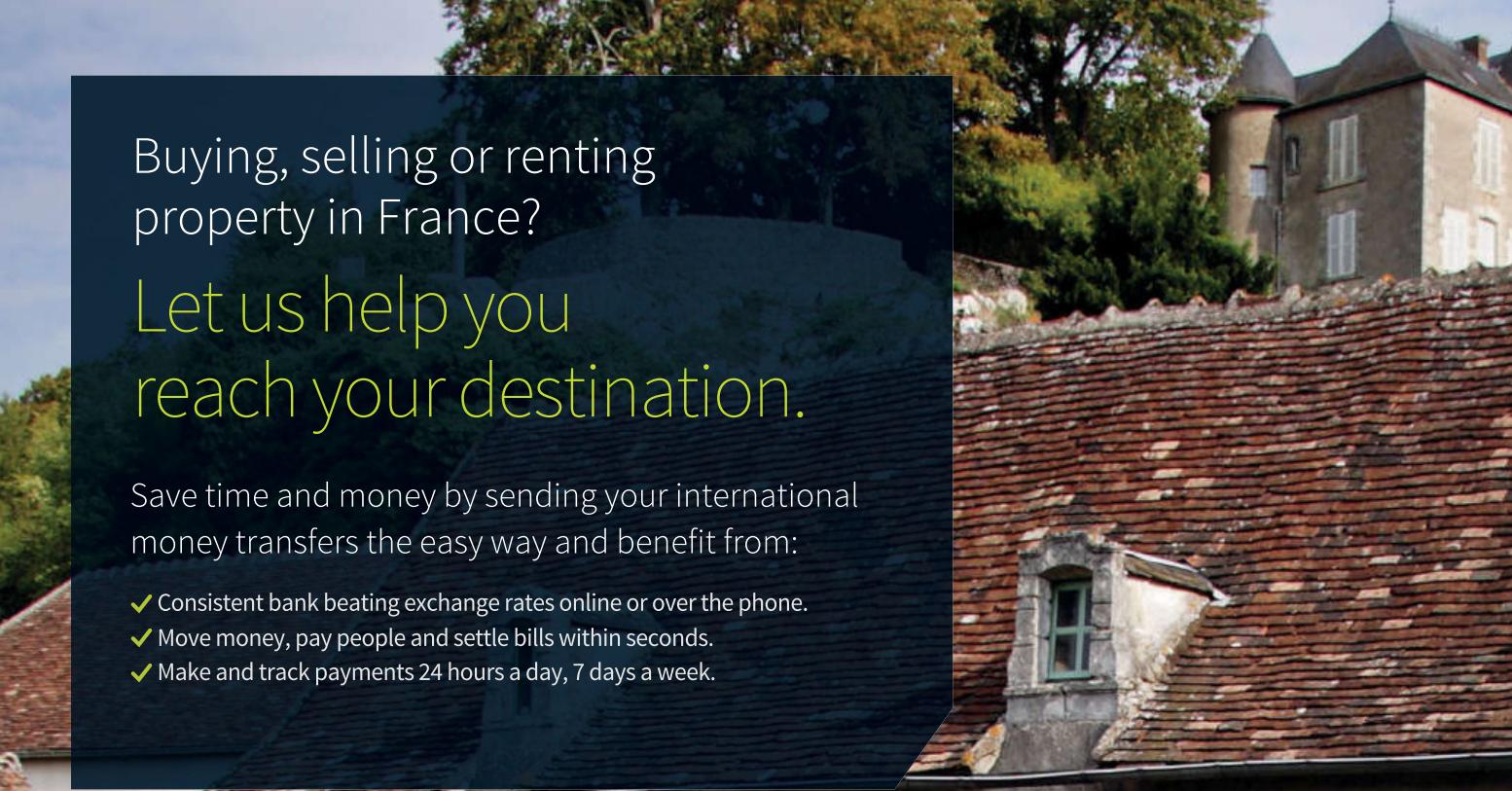
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Feed your soul

One of the reasons that I, and I'm sure so many of us, love France so much is its wonderfully varied regional cuisine. I was reminded of the nation's appreciation of good-quality locally sourced produce when reading French chef Gabriel Gâté's new book *A Cook's Tour of France*. We share five of his mouth-watering recipes on page 52.

Producing food in a sustainable and ethical way was especially important for expat couple Louisa and Stuart Hallewell, who moved from England to Midi-Pyrénées where they run an organic farm. Find out how they made it a success on page 40.

Continuing the theme of food and drink, we bring you the first in a three-part series of Alex Quick's book *How to be French*. His witty take on the etiquette of French food and drink (see page 46) will help you get under the skin of this national obsession.

If, like me, the shortening days and cooling

temperatures are making you dream of the sunny south, transport yourself to a life in Var on page 20. This beautiful part of Provence seems to have it all, from the swanky resort of Saint-Tropez to sleepy medieval villages, not to mention its glittering sun-drenched coastline.

I hope you enjoy this issue. If you'd like to let us know what you think, join us on Twitter (@LivingFrance) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/livingfrancemagazine), or write to us at the address overleaf.

Have a wonderful October,

Stephanie

Stephanie Sheldrake, Assistant Editor

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Living France

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Kate McNally

As former editor of our sister title *FRANCE Magazine*, Kate enjoyed the subject matter so much that she left the UK with her family to set up a new life across the Channel, in rural Ardèche. This issue she reveals the role of the French pharmacy on page 74.



Ian Moore

Comedian, mod and chutney-maker, Ian lives in the Loire Valley with his wife Natalie and their three bilingual boys. In his humorous column this month (page 98), he reveals why his liver is in much need of a break from the excesses of summer.



Emma Rawle

During her time working for *Living France*, staff writer Emma has enjoyed discovering new corners of the country she first visited as a child on family holidays. This issue she learns how a New York native has found a happy family life in Provence on page 34.

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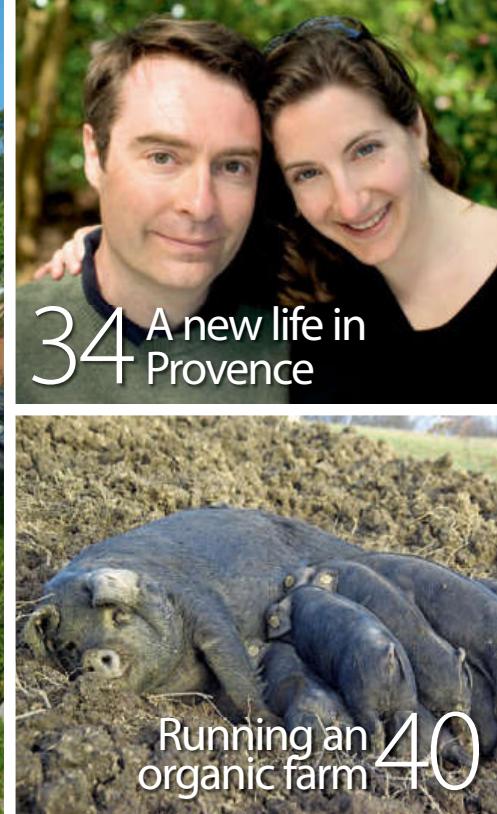
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© DEGAS Jean-Pierre / hemis.fr



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WIN!
Julia Stagg's
latest novel
page 13



DÉCOUVREZ

October in France

For a city break with extra sparkle, Reims in Champagne-Ardenne has much to offer its visitors. Together with Épernay, the town is the champagne capital of France with many cellars that are open to the public. Close to the town's magnificent cathedral is Café du Palais (pictured), which exudes 1930s charm with its original Art Deco glass roof and period features. From 21 September to 4 October, restaurants across France offer two meals for the price of one and special menus, as part of the Tous au Restaurant event (see the website for participating restaurants).

www.reims-tourisme.com www.cafedupalais.fr www.tousaurestaurant.com

© JOHN KELLERMAN / ALAMY





News & events

With several key anniversaries and plenty of food festivals, October is a great time to soak up some culture. *Emma Rawle* unveils this month's popular festivals, book releases and travel news



François I, patron of the arts

1 This year marks the 500th anniversary of the coronation of **François I**, who ruled from 1515 to 1547. Under his reign, the Renaissance movement flourished in France, and he remains the king best-known for his legacy of iconic châteaux, including the Château de Chambord and the Château de Fontainebleau, as well as his patronage of artist Leonardo da Vinci. To celebrate the 500th anniversary there are events and exhibitions in a number of Loire châteaux including an exhibition of François' extensive library of books at the Château Royal de Blois (pictured above) running **until 18 October**.

www.francois1er.org

Impressionist Claude Monet

2 The artist **Claude Monet**'s garden in Giverny is instantly recognisable from both his paintings and the many photographs taken since. An exhibition running **until 1 November** at the Musée des Impressionnismes in Giverny aims to offer a new interpretation of the garden through images from five world-renowned photographers: Stephen Shore; Darren Almond; Bernard Plossu; Elger Esser and Henri Foucault. If you want to see the real thing and take your own photographs, Monet's garden in Giverny (pictured, top right) is open to visitors until 1 November.

www.mdig.fr

Louis XIV, the Sun King

3 Another favourite French king is being celebrated this year, as 2015 marks the 300th anniversary of the death of **Louis XIV**, known as 'le Roi Soleil' ('the Sun King'). Made king at the age of four, he ruled France from 1643 until his death in 1715 and under his reign France became one of the major powers in Europe. The magnificent Palace of Versailles (pictured above) was built under his reign and will feature exhibitions to mark the anniversary. These include the reopening of the restored Louis XIV rooms and an exhibition exploring the immediate aftermath of the king's death.

www.chateauversailles.fr

BEST OF BRITISH

Film fans flock to the seaside town of Dinard for the annual **British Film Festival**, this year running from **30 September to 4 October**. There will be showings of recent British films starring favourite actors including Stephen Mangan, Anna Maxwell Martin and James Nesbitt. Tickets for the screenings cost €5.50 and go on sale 30 minutes before the show. The pre-festival runs for a month before the festival and includes free showings of popular films such as *The Imitation Game* and *The Theory of Everything*.

www.festivaldufilm-dinard.com





An education

From **12-18 October** the French public receive a lesson in food from well-known professionals during **La Semaine du Goût**. The aim is to teach children and adults about food through lessons in schools, workshops with professionals and special menus in restaurants. Running for some 25 years, the initiative provides fun for all generations to learn more about food.

www.legout.com



Book worms

Autumn sees book-lovers descend on the town of Le Mans for the annual **25e Heure du Livre**, this year taking place on **10-11 October**. Welcoming around 30,000 visitors and 200 authors, the fair includes debates, author interviews, exhibitions and workshops. Part of the fair is designed to celebrate French-language literature while the other part is open to all forms of writing such as comic strips, science fiction and writing for children.

www.la25eheureduivre.fr



FACE THE MUSIC

Named after the two medieval towers that guard the entrance to the old port of La Rochelle, the **Jazz Entre les Deux Tours** festival welcomes more than a hundred musicians to the town from **6-10 October**, when a mixture of internationally famous and local musicians perform in a number of concert venues across the city. Some concerts are free and there are also various photo exhibitions and educational activities on offer.

www.jazzentrelesdeuxtours.fr

Raise a glass

France's vineyards have reason to celebrate as both the 'hillsides, houses and wine cellars of Champagne' and the 'climate and *terroirs* of Burgundy' have been named UNESCO World Heritage Sites. For Champagne, this includes the champagne houses in Reims and the world-famous Avenue de Champagne in Épernay and some of the oldest vineyards around the village of Hautvillers where, legend has it, the monk Dom Pérignon invented the fermentation process that makes champagne fizz. In Burgundy the areas covered are the Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune south of the city of Dijon.

www.tourisme-champagne-ardenne.com

www.climats-bourgogne.com



TASTE OF FRANCE

We pick three famous food festivals celebrating local specialities



TURN UP THE HEAT

The *piment d'Espelette* pepper is celebrated in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques commune of the same name. The **Fête du Piment** runs from **24-25 October** and includes a food market, while restaurants serve traditional meals and there are shows and a ceremony to bless the pepper harvest.

www.espelette.fr



CALL OF THE SEA

The *crevette grise* (shrimp) is a speciality of Honfleur, and is celebrated along with the town's maritime culture with the annual **Fête de la Crevette**, this year on **3-4 October**. The festival includes performances of sea shanties, shrimp peeling competitions and cooking demonstrations of local fish recipes.

www.ot-honfleur.fr



LET THEM EAT CAKE

Legend has it that *Gâteau Basque* has its origins in the village of Cambo-les-Bains in Pyrénées-Atlantiques. As a result, the village holds the **Fête du Gâteau Basque** every year to honour the pastry. Taking place this year on **4 October**, the festival welcomes 13,000 visitors who come to taste the *gâteau* and learn to make it.

www.lafetedugateaubasque.com

Tempted by the delights of Pyrénées-Atlantiques? Next month's destination feature casts the spotlight on this charming coastal mountain department.



PASTURES NEW

At the beginning of autumn the cattle that have spent the summer grazing Alpine mountain pastures are bought back down the valley for the winter. This passage is celebrated in Annecy every year on the second Saturday in October (this year **10 October**) with the **Retour des Alpages** festival. Cattle are paraded through the streets and there are craftsmen, local producers and traditional bands all gathering to celebrate the changing seasons.

www.lac-annecy.com



Fit for a prince

Parents looking for a way to amuse their little ones during the October half-term holiday should head to Alsace for a visit to the **Parc du Petit Prince** in Ungersheim. Inspired by the classic text *Le Petit Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the park has a number of attractions based around the themes of flight and space exploration. Opened in 2014, the park's main attractions



are two tethered hot-air balloons which rise 150 metres to offer views of the Vosges mountains, and there is also a 3D cinema, labyrinth and petting farm.

www.parcdupetitprince.com



NIGHT OWLS

For a chance to see Paris as you never have before, head to the French capital on **3 October** for the **Nuit Blanche** event. From 7pm until 7am hundreds of museums, galleries, cinemas and even swimming pools open their doors for free for a night-time celebration of art and culture. You will find performances, light installations, concerts and exhibitions across the city and, if you make it till dawn, many town halls provide breakfast.

www.paris.fr

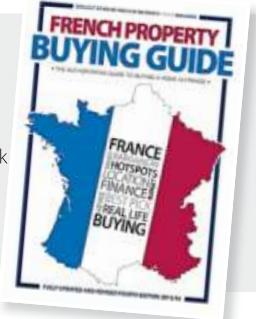


Ultimate guide

Dreaming of buying a house in France but not sure where to start? Look no further than the *French Property Buying Guide*, produced by our sister magazine *French Property News*. This no-nonsense guide explains how to choose a location and how the buying process in France works, from contracts and surveys through to removals and taxes. The guide also

features in-depth location guides revealing highlights, attractions, property prices and climates for every department in France to help you best decide where to look for your dream home.

French Property Buying Guide, fourth edition 2015/16
£6.99 www.buyamag.co.uk/France-Magazines





Born to run

The beautiful peninsula of Lège-Cap Ferret in Gironde is the setting for the ninth **Marathon des Villages** on **18 October**. The marathon winds its way through little villages, along forest trails and limestone paths and offers stunning views of the Bassin d'Arcachon and the Atlantic coast. If taking on a marathon sounds a bit ambitious, try the Randonnée des Villages on **17 October** instead, which is a guided three-hour walk along part of the marathon course. In the evening there is a 'pasta party' where runners can stock up on carbs and oysters before the race the next day.

www.marathon-des-villages.com

DID YOU KNOW?

The length of the reign of Louis XIX, who was king of France for the shortest time period*

20 min

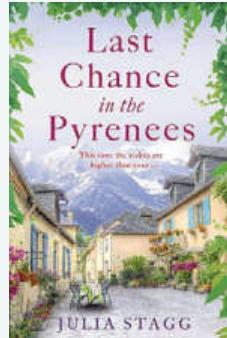
VILLAGE POLITICS

WIN!

Fans of Julia Stagg's series of books about the inhabitants of the fictional village of Fogas will greet the latest instalment with a mixture of excitement and sadness, as it is the last in the series. The story is as gripping as ever – *Last Chance in the Pyrenees* sees tragedy strike the small village, triggering a battle for the town hall that brings out both the best and the worst in the villagers. Despite their grief and politics, the community come together to defend their way of life and the village they love. As entertaining and eventful as ever, *Last Chance in the Pyrenees* will have fans hoping it isn't the last we hear of the inhabitants of Fogas.

We have six copies of *Last Chance in the Pyrenees* to give away. For a chance to win visit www.completefrance.com/community-forum. The closing date is 20 October 2015.

Last Chance in the Pyrenees, Julia Stagg, £7.99, Hodder



Travel news



PAINT THE TOWN RED

As part of a series of measures to encourage more people to cycle in the capital, cyclists in Paris are now not required to stop at all red lights. Signs showing an upside down triangle with a bicycle and an arrow have appeared at 1,800 junctions in Paris and indicate that when the light is red, cyclists may proceed with caution, carrying either straight on or turning right. It is hoped this will make cycling in the capital safer as many accidents happen when cyclists get caught beside lorries and buses at traffic lights.



SET SAIL

It is now possible to book ferry trips for next year, as Brittany Ferries is taking bookings until 6 November 2016. Tickets can be secured with a £35 deposit, with the full amount due 46 days before departure. Brittany Ferries has also increased the frequency of ferries on several routes, with up to two high-speed return crossings a day from Portsmouth to Cherbourg and daily *économies* services from Portsmouth to Le Havre.

www.brittany-ferries.co.uk



WHEELS ON THE BUS

New legislation that came into force in August has relaxed the restrictions on coach travel in France. As a result, budget coach company Megabus has launched nine new routes between French cities with prices starting from €1 for a one-way ticket. Other private coach companies are expected to follow suit. The aim of the law is to modernise France's economy and speed up growth.

www.megabus.com



CAUGHT ON CAMERA

British drivers speeding on France's roads will no longer be able to avoid paying fines under new EU rules due to come into force in 2017. Currently French police impose on-the-spot fines, though the logistics of collecting fines from the half a million British drivers caught on camera every year can prove challenging. For the first time, police in other EU countries will be given the right to access British motorists' details from the DVLA, making it easier to track down offenders. However, it remains unclear how foreign police plan to pursue those who fail to pay the fines.

Dream property...



Every so often we come across a French property that knocks us for six. This month, *Eve Middleton* is dreaming of a manor house in south-west France



Getting away from the rat race, being your own boss, working to live and not living to work - call it what you will - this is often one of the reasons why so many of us choose a more laid-back lifestyle across the Channel.

This 19th-century, six-bedroom and two-suite property just outside the pretty Charente village of Aubeterre-sur-Dronne offers a lifestyle that could restore a more

equal work-life balance. This gorgeous historic manor house with sprawling views over the surrounding countryside has been recently renovated before being run as a B&B, so is ready for a new owner to take up the reins and really make it their own.

Set in an idyllic tranquil spot, yet close to the restaurants and cafés in the village - not to mention the tempting delights of the Sunday food market - the property has approximately two acres of land, as well as gardens with an

orchard and a wood, set out alongside an outdoor swimming pool, boules pitch, and two stately honey-stone *pigeonnier* towers.

Don't mistake its rural location for inaccessibility, though - at just 30 minutes from Angoulême and 60 minutes from Bordeaux, there's every reason for friends and family to come and visit in order to help you restore the latter element of that important work-life balance. **LF**

www.besthouseinfrance.com

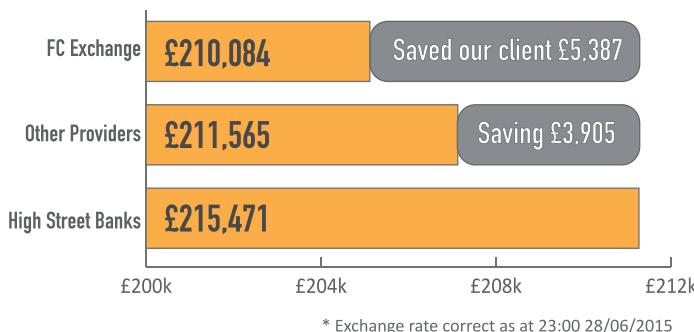
EXCHANGE RATES MOVE FAST...

BUT DOES YOUR BANK?

Increasingly, people are steering away from the banks when it comes to making international money transfers. It is common knowledge that banks are big, can be impersonal and are often unresponsive. So, why are they still being used to transfer money overseas when a foreign exchange specialist can provide an easy and much more cost-effective service?

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Charles Murray at FC Exchange points out that 2015 has already thrown up a few surprises within the currency market and, with the pound reaching a seven-year-high versus the euro, it is important to stay in contact with a broker who can keep you abreast of the exchange rate fluctuations. Limit and stop orders can be helpful to clients, enabling them to maximise their returns

by allowing them to target a better rate of exchange whilst at the same time having a safety net in place to secure the rate if the market moves adversely.

Charles Murray
Private Desk Manager



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€79,000

Savoie, Rhône-Alpes

This fully furnished studio apartment in Champagny in the Paradiski area sleeps up to three people and would be the ideal ski base. A short walk from the ski lifts and close to the shops and restaurants, the apartment also has a private ski locker and sunny terrace.

Agent: France Property Shop www.francepropertyshop.com



€97,500

Haute-Vienne, Limousin

Located in a rural hamlet, this cute cottage with plenty of period features has been renovated and is being sold fully furnished. It offers one bedroom, an open-plan living and dining room, a fully equipped kitchen and 1.2 acres of gardens and parkland.

Agent: Limousin Property Agents www.limousinpropertyagents.com



€143,900

Vendée, Pays de la Loire

This striking stone house was built in the 19th century and offers spacious living areas and a pretty garden. There are two large bedrooms both with feature fireplaces, plus a kitchen, a living room, two cellars, a wine press room and several outbuildings.

Agent: France Property Shop www.francepropertyshop.com



€159,100

Côtes-d'Armor, Brittany

At the end of a hamlet, one kilometre from the nearest village, this traditional *longère* property offers countryside walks on the doorstep. There are three bedrooms and an open-plan kitchen/living room with wooden floors and exposed beams throughout the house.

Agent: A House in Brittany www.ahouseinbrittany.com



€180,200

Corrèze, Limousin

Set in the pretty village of Saint-Hilaire-Peyroux, this traditional cottage benefits from a good location and countryside views. Fully restored, the stone cottage has three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room, kitchen, landscaped garden, driveway and patio.

Agent: Agence Newton www.agencenewton.com



€192,500

Charente-Maritime, Poitou-Charentes

Located in a coastal village less than an hour from La Rochelle, this house is within walking distance of the beach and enjoys uninterrupted views of the coast. It offers a spacious, open-plan living room and kitchen, three bedrooms and a small terrace.

Agent: Charente Immobilier www.charente-immobilier.com



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STAR LETTER

SLIPPERY SITUATION

Having just bought our house in a tiny hamlet in rural France, we spent the Christmas holidays there undertaking renovation work. While there, we arranged for a delivery of oil for the central heating system. A large tanker duly arrived on the morning of New Year's Eve and the driver explained that it required careful handling, due to the fact that it contained some 25,000 litres of oil.

We left him to connect a large hose from the lorry to the oil tank in the outbuildings. Some 10 minutes later, he'd completed the job and left with a cheery "Au revoir!".

Imagine our surprise when no more than a minute or two later, there was a loud hammering on the door. We opened it to find an ashen-faced driver, hands shaking, puffing away on a hastily lit cigarette. He led us round the side of the house where we saw, with incredulity, that the rear of the lorry had completely disappeared into a huge hole in our garden, leaving the front of the vehicle suspended high in the air. The driver paced back and forth, all the time sucking heavily on his cigarette, swearing profusely.

Our anxiety reached fever pitch when we realised that liquid was pouring into the hole,

which we assumed was the 25,000 litres of fuel oil. Not only that, he continued puffing away on his cigarette apparently oblivious to the potential dangers.

In desperation, we ran to our next-door neighbours for help. Our neighbour dutifully followed us back, only to recoil in horror at the sight that met him and hot-footed it back towards his own house.

We thought we were on our own - how wrong we were. Five minutes later, our neighbour reappeared with half a dozen others from the hamlet. Within 10 minutes, they'd identified the liquid as being water from a burst pipe; turned the water supply off in the road; notified the oil company; arranged for the arrival of a back-up tanker; and got the agreement of the local farmer for a huge crane to be brought across his field to lift the sunken lorry out and onto solid land.

Four hours later, the job was done, leaving us with the problem of how to get our car over such an impassable hole. We needn't have worried: a short while later, our neighbour came back with a digger, and within another hour, the hole had been filled with gravel.

It was, without doubt, one definite way to break the ice!

Jonathan Sweet
Luche-sur-Brioux, Poitou-Charentes



GLASS ACT

I enjoyed reading Emma Rawle's article on Corrèze in the September 2015 magazine. We visited the area a few years ago and found it as stunning as the article suggests. I was interested to read that Coco Chanel got inspiration for her logo from church windows in Aubazine. I too was inspired by the magnificent 12th-century windows and used them to create my Christmas cards that year (pictured).

Linda Garrett
Leominster, Herefordshire

Social network

Paul Heathcote @pmheathcote

I always forget that France closes early. No grabbing something from the supermarket on your way home after a long day. Croissants for tea!

Deborah @bfblogger2015

Good food and friends in Avignon today...Moliere's was a great choice! That's another take on gazpacho I'm sipping.

Leanne Hyland via Facebook

I'm currently in Paris sat on the steps of the Pantheon for a great view of the Eiffel Tower this lunch time!

Kate Hill @KatedeCamont

Visiting my new best friends at Chateau de Mazelières this morning under brooding Gascon skies...

Allez Français via Facebook

Crumbs! Historic laws forcing bakers to curtail their holidays over the summer have been scrapped – could we be facing a baguette crisis?!

Hermione 2015

@hermionevoyage
#Hermione has finally returned home to France after a 4-month, 10,000-mile journey across the transatlantic!

WIN!

The writer of our Star Letter this issue wins a **Surprise Box** worth £29 containing a selection of

five to seven traditional French products courtesy of Bonjour French Food. For more information on the full range of hampers available visit www.bonjourfrenchfood.com



If you have something you'd like to share, from anecdotes to holiday snaps, drop us a line at letters@livingfrance.com or to *The Letters Editor, Living France, Cumberland House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, GL50 1BB*



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A GARDEN VISITOR
Vercheny, Drôme – Douglas MacIldowie



SUNFLOWERS IN BLOOM
Saujon, Charente-Maritime – Sharon and Andy



CAMPING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE
Saint-Brieuc, Côtes-d'Armor – Ann Joynson



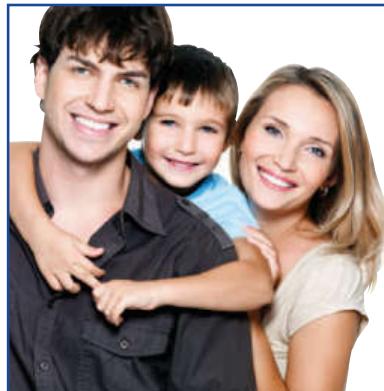
ENJOYING RETIREMENT
Utah Beach, Manche – Andy Milne



SUNNY BROCANTE
Île-de-Ré, Charente-Maritime – Jean Moors



D-DAY COMMEMORATION
Arromanches, Calvados – Alan Pavey



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SOVAR, so good

With its breathtaking scenery, magnificent coastline, rich history and mouth-watering gastronomy, the department of Var will capture your heart, says *Solange Hando*







From vineyards and olive groves, to beaches and mountains dotted with medieval villages, the department of Var is so diverse it makes fun of borders. The river whose name it bears is nowhere to be seen - since the boundary was moved in 1860 - and the department begins in Provence and ends up on the celebrated Côte d'Azur, without the price tag for the most part. Backed by a lush hinterland, blessed by year-round festivals and a beautiful stretch of the Riviera mirrored in the crystal clear waters of the Mediterranean, it's the best of both worlds. No wonder it's a favourite holiday destination for the French and, for British expats, a place in the sun where dreams come true.



"I was studying languages at Bath University," says Laura Valentine (left), "when I met a Frenchman and moved straight to Toulon after I graduated in 1988. There's everything here in Var for the family, from sandy beaches and azure waters to stunning countryside and lakes. And the southern Alps are only a couple of hours away. I run a translating business from home, so I can choose my own hours and sneak off to the beach if I get a minute! I honestly don't think I could go back to life in a big city. As cities go, Toulon is quite small."

Lively, colourful and definitely on a human scale, Toulon is the capital of Var, and is a mix of stylish squares and boulevards, alleyways untouched by time, and pedestrian lanes with sights that say it all: here a shop promising a *'cure gourmande'* (gourmet treats), there a pâtisserie with tempting creations. On the nearby Cours Lafayette, the daily market is in full swing: tomatoes, peaches, apricots, knobbly peppers you have to hold in both hands, olives, melons and more. It's a serious business for the shoppers browsing the juiciest pickings in this generous kaleidoscope of colours and smells. Meanwhile on the shaded square, visitors and locals alike enjoy a pause on a café terrace, unperturbed by the gentle gurgling of a fountain or the chiming of cathedral bells.

As every local will tell you, all roads in Toulon lead to 'the most beautiful harbour in Europe'. Known since ancient times and home to the French Navy, the vast bay of Toulon basks magnificently in the southern light, almost enclosed by peninsulas and sheltered by hills to the north. Yachts glisten in the marina, ferries leave for Corsica, and cruise ship passengers step ashore full of anticipation. Some join a guided tour of the city, while locals head for the sandy beaches of Le Mourillon or simply relax along the quay where restaurants serve scrumptious seafood salads, *moules*





From vineyards and olive groves to beaches and mountains, Var is so diverse it makes fun of borders



marinière and the ubiquitous Rosé de Provence. For a close look at the naval base, a ‘tour de la rade’ can be booked at the tourist office. Or, for just €2, water buses will whizz you across the bay to the Saint-Mandrier peninsula and Les Sablettes where the scent of lavender drifts down to the beach. The crossing takes about 15 minutes and passes old fortifications, mussel beds and the Belle Époque villas tucked among the pines in Les Tamaris.

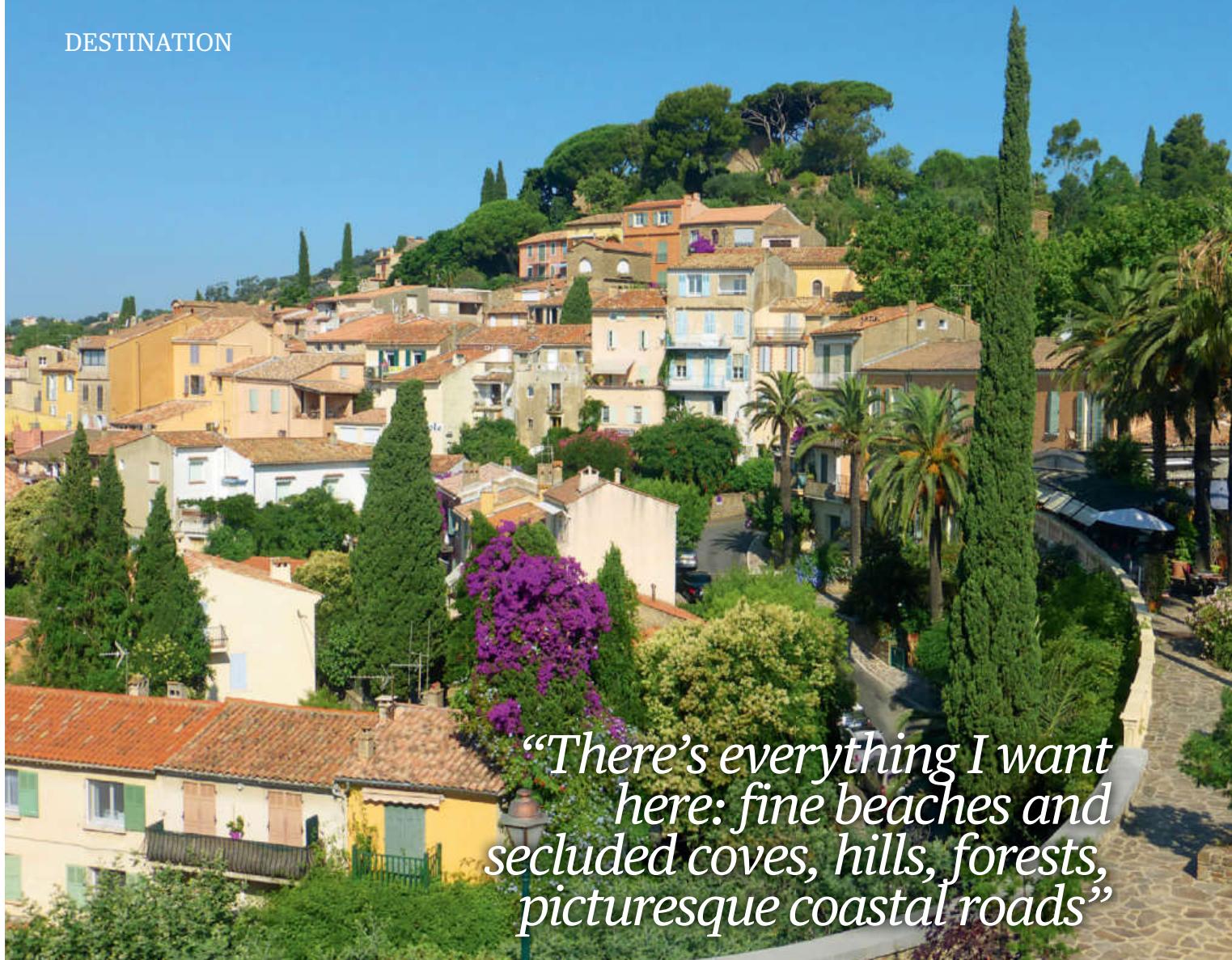
Out in the bay, the impressive barrier of the Monts Toulonnais frames the city, their white limestone summits highlighting the blue sea and the green umbrella pines on the lower slopes. The highest point is Mont Caume at 804 metres, and the most popular is Mont Faron, easily accessed from the city by road or cable car. At the top, at almost 600 metres, Toulon is at your feet. The bay spreads like a giant canvas and the peninsulas and islands rise silhouetted against the blue sky. There are a couple of traditional restaurants, a museum dedicated to the allied landing in Provence and for those who love to ramble, a beautiful forest criss-crossed by sign-posted footpaths. Vibrant golden blooms line the trails, cicadas insects sing incessantly in the trees and there are fabulous views of the hinterland: all wooded hills and scattered villages and the emerald Lac du Revest, with its sparkling blue water,

nestling among the trees.

Beyond the sprinkling of resorts west of Toulon, Bandol beckons, with vineyards near the coast on south-facing slopes, sheltered from the mistral and gently cooled by the sea breeze. The first vines were planted in 600 BC and today AOC Bandol delights connoisseurs far beyond the departmental borders. At the foot of the hills, once haunted by the jet set, Bandol is now a ‘ville tranquille’ where French families spend quiet holidays in secluded villas. There are sandy beaches and rocky coves and the Île de Bendor, little more than a rock, which was bought by pastis magnate, Paul Ricard, and is devoted to art exhibitions.

Two years ago, Claire Croft, a retired lecturer from Kent, found her dream holiday home near Bandol. “I love the Riviera,” she says. “The blue sea, the light, the breeze which cools you down; I spent many holidays on the Côte d’Azur then finally I chose to buy in this area because it is

Opening pages:
taking in Bormes-les-Mimosas
These pages,
clockwise from
top left: Toulon;
the beach at Le
Mourillon; the
Place de la Liberté;
seafood dishes are
a speciality; fresh
market produce



“There’s everything I want here: fine beaches and secluded coves, hills, forests, picturesque coastal roads”

This page, from top: Bormes-les-Mimosas; fishing boats in Saint-Tropez

less crowded, wilder and more affordable. There's everything I want here: fine beaches and secluded coves, hills, forests, picturesque coastal roads and lots of pines for shade. Another attraction for me are the restaurants, which are authentic and traditional, rather than just geared to tourists. Best of all, I can invite my children and grandchildren to stay, and with so much to discover in the Var, we do have some wonderful holidays together. That's what we call quality time."

Further east along the coast from Bandol - around 30 minutes east of the capital - lies Hyères-les-Palmiers, a 'green city' full of colour and fragrance, and the top producer of cut flowers in France. Boasting some 8,000 tropical trees, orange groves and panoramic gardens, it is a beautiful and stunning sight. Up on the hill, the old village and castle look down on an amazing ribbon of family-friendly beaches and the thin strips of land around the Giens peninsula, otherwise covered in salt marshes and lagoons, which are home to migrating birds and flamingos.

From Hyères, ferries sail to Les îles d'Or, a group of islands comprising Port-Cros, with its mountainous national park; the island of Le Levant favoured by nudists; and Porquerolles, the most visited, with its cheerful little village draped in flowers and eucalyptus trees, as well as idyllic beaches and unspoilt countryside, which can only be





explored along cycling or walking trails. In peak season, the islands can also be reached from other coastal resorts, such as Le Lavandou.

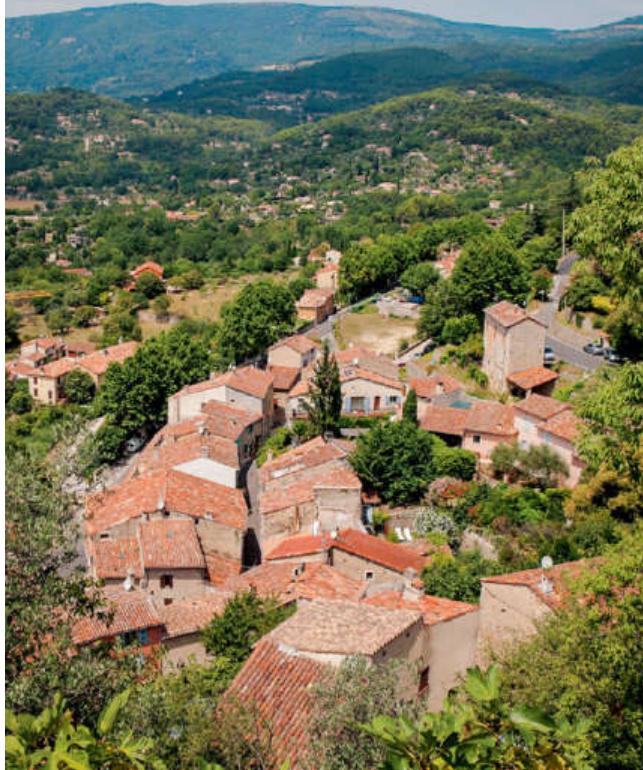
Beyond Hyères, the best way to travel is to hop on a Varlib bus, just €3 a trip, anywhere in Var, or less if you buy a pass for 10 journeys. So there's no excuse to lounge on a beach every day, although in Le Lavandou one may well be tempted. This pretty, pastel-hued resort counts no less than 12 beaches, each one claiming a different type of sand lapped by blue shimmering water and fringed by a coastal path with new vistas on every corner. Rigging tinkle in the harbour and every afternoon, a gathering of *pétanque* players meet under the plane trees. Le Lavandou is a relaxed sort of place for eating al fresco, swimming, sailing, spotting dolphins and whales, and marvelling at the nearby medieval village of Bormes-les-Mimosas. High on the slopes, it's a maze of stepped alleyways, arches and vaults dripping with bougainvillea, oleander, jasmine, pale-blue plumbago, and 700 other species of plants; fully deserving its title of 'most beautiful village in bloom' and its European Gold Medal. The views from the town hall esplanade are superb, from the hills to the sea, and there are scenic walks through the fragrant Mediterranean *garrigue* and pine trees.

Beyond Le Lavandou, the 'Corniche des Maures' follows the coast past the 'Jardin des Méditerranées' at Domaine du

Rayol, then on to the bustling resort of Cavalaire-sur-Mer and the Saint-Tropez peninsula with its 'villages perchés' above the vineyards, such as Ramatuelle or Gassin, looking out to Port-Grimaud's Venetian style marina and the Bay of Saint-Tropez. Saint-Tropez is fashionable and expensive, especially during the annual regatta, but otherwise, sleek yachts aside, its luxury is discreet and day visitors happily wander along the quay, gazing at the traditional fishing boats, the colourful reflections of waterside buildings, and the iconic church tower before unwinding on the famous white sands of Pampelonne, or climbing through the old town to the citadel for more breath-taking views. Across the bay, just like 'Saint-Trop', Sainte-Maxime is a haven for artists who love the light and scenery here. The coast then winds its way to the last outposts of Var: Fréjus and its Roman remains and sunny Saint-Raphaël, framed by the red cliffs of Estérel. 

This page,
clockwise from
above: vineyards
near Gassin; a street
scene in the village;
cycling in Les îles
d'Or; Port Grimaud

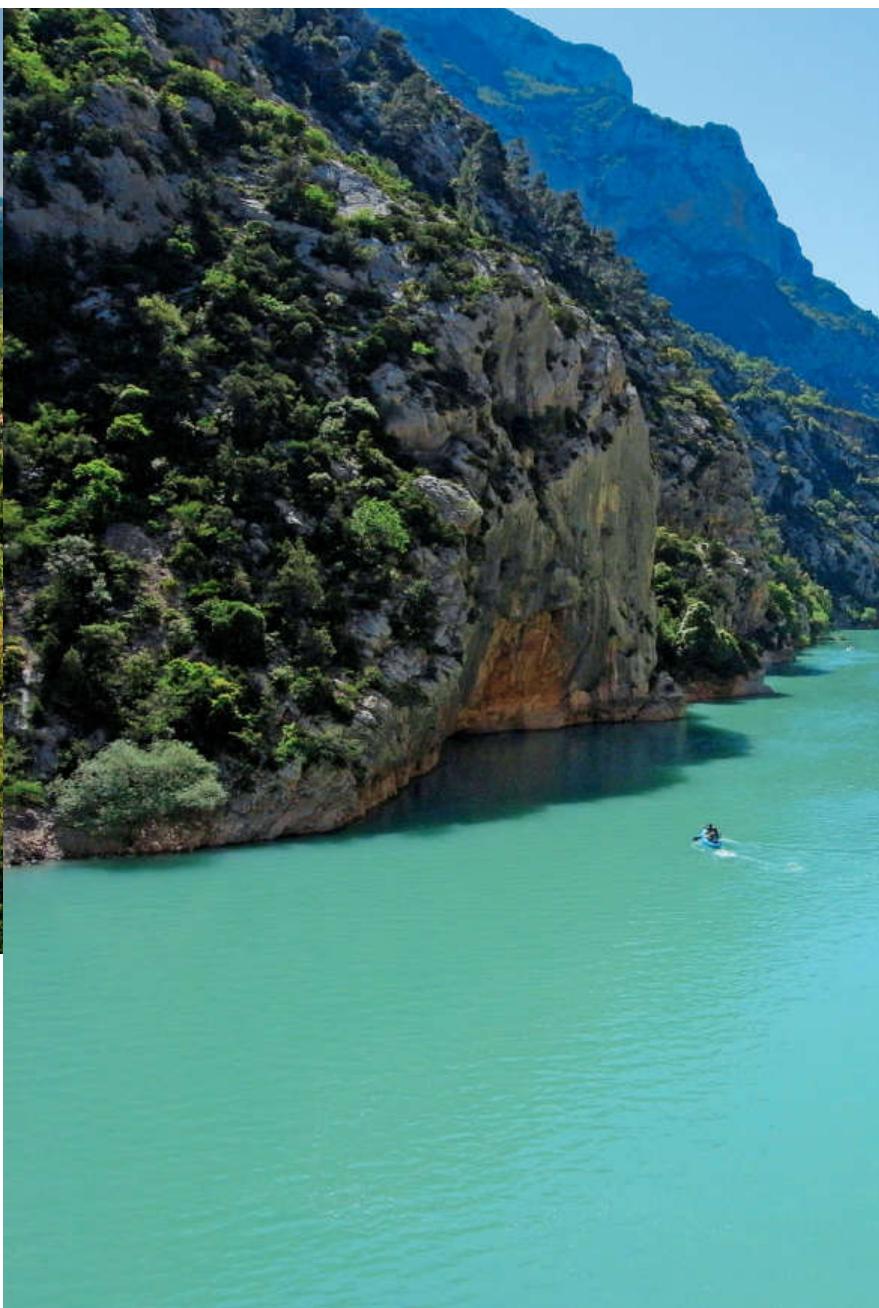
DESTINATION

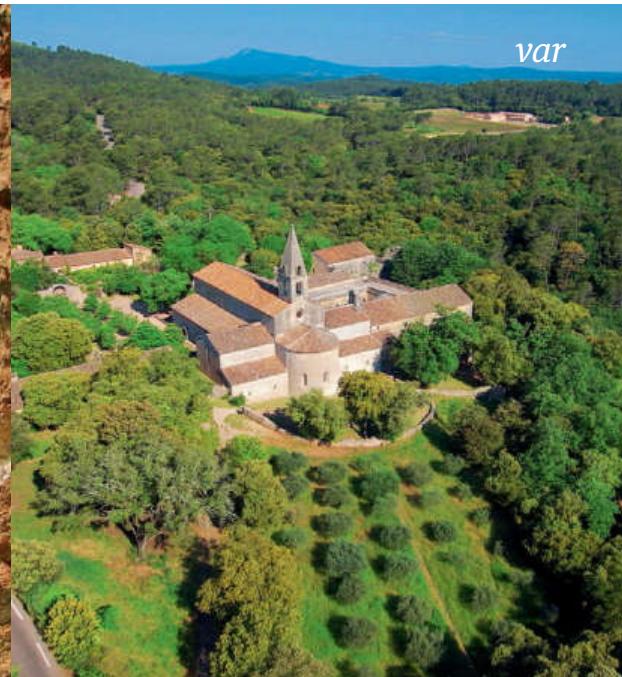


But there is more to Var than coastal delights. With more than 60% of the territory covered in forest and a greater variety of plants than any other department, the hinterland is a rollercoaster of mountains and hills rising towards the Alps in ever-changing landscapes. To the west, the Massif de la Sainte-Baume tops 1,100 metres, a sheer limestone barrier where according to legend, Mary Magdalene found refuge in a grotto, which shares the limelight with the eponymous basilica in Saint-Maximin. To the east, the fiery rocks of Estérel plunge into the sea, and in between, the Massif des Maures, one of the wildest areas in Provence where red-roofed villages doze among cork oak and chestnut trees. Var claims four of the Plus Beaux Villages de France, including Tourtour, 'the village in the sky', and Bargème, at 1,097 metres, the highest in the department; and other hill-top villages as pretty as postcards, especially in the Pays de Fayence.

Space, scenery, fresh air, the '*arrière-pays*' is truly Provençal: fragrant with rosemary, juniper and thyme. It's the perfect place to ramble along spectacular trails, cycle through the forest or enjoy the panorama on horseback. Villages offer local produce: truffles in Aups, chestnuts in Collongues, honey and cheese around Draguignan, figs in the Gapeau valley, and after feasting in one of the local bistros, there may be time to chat to a pipe-maker, a potter, a wood-turner, or seek out an old oil press or a wine cellar for a bottle or two of Côtes de Provence. It's all part of the local heritage, just like lonely castles and chapels, the troglodyte dwellings in Cotignac or the inspiring Abbaye du Thoronet hidden at the heart of the forest.

Meanwhile, the River Argens meanders for 114km across the department; from its source in the west, to the sea near Fréjus, past villages and vineyards and the dramatic outcrop of Roquebrune; delighting every canoeist along the way





var

The hinterland is a rollercoaster of mountains and hills rising towards the Alps

with its rushing waters and quiet stretches. On a hot summer day, the lakes also make a pleasant change from the coast: Carcès for a spot of fishing, or Saint-Cassien for swimming and boating; or the lovely lake of Sainte-Croix, one of the largest in France, which marks the northern border of Var and is the entrance to Les Gorges du Verdon.

Without a doubt, Var has it all for those searching for a slower pace of life and spectacular scenery. **LF**

These pages, clockwise from top left: Fayence; looking down into the Gorges du Verdon; Le Thoronet; on the water at Roquebrune-sur-Argens

NEXT MONTH...

DESTINATION: PYRÉNÉES-ATLANTIQUES

Discover life in this department with both coast and mountains

Fact file

Tourist information

 Var tourist board

Tel: 00 33 (0)4 94 18 59 60

www.visitvar.fr

Where to stay

 Best Western Hôtel La Corniche

17 Littoral Frédéric Mistral, Quartier du Mourillon
83000 Toulon

Tel: 00 33 (0)4 94 41 35 12

www.hotel-corniche.com

Hôtel de la Fossette

16 Avenue du Capitaine Thorel
83980 Le Lavandou
Tel: 00 33 (0)4 94 20 30 40
www.hotel-de-la-fossette.fr

Where to eat

 Le Désiré

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88400 Hyères
Tel: 00 33 (0)4 94 20 27 38
www.restaurant-ledesire.com

Le Pescadou

Place des Barrys
83580 Gassin
Tel: 00 33 (4) 94 56 12 43
www.restaurant-lepescadou-gassin.fr

Getting there

There is a direct train from Paris to

Toulon (prices starting from £121 return).

www.voyages-sncf.com

CityJet and Flybe fly to Toulon from the UK.



A FINE HARVEST

An olive farm in Var captured the hearts of Gerry and Mark Whitcombe-Power, where they now run gîtes and produce their very own AOC olive oil. **Deborah Curtis** finds out more

When Gerry Whitcombe-Power and her husband, Mark, first set eyes on Les Escavalins, the farm in the Var department had lain derelict for nearly 50 years; destroyed by a terrible frost which wreaked havoc across the area on Valentine's Day in 1956.

The freezing temperatures that night killed 80% of the orchards and olive groves in the department, forcing many farmers to abandon their land for good. Today, however, the former fruit farm on the edge of the village of Belgentier, is a thriving olive farm and gîte rental, thanks to Gerry and Mark's vision, determination and hard work.

The couple began their search for a property in France after Gerry's mother, who was French and lived in London, died in January 2004. "It was a real wake up call," says Gerry, who gave up her job as a Montessori teacher to look after her mum in the last year of her life. "We were living in London at the time, and we knew we wanted to move to France, but it was really mum who was the galvanising force to make us go ahead and do it."

Gerry knew the area well, having spent numerous summers near Cannes as a child: "Mum's dad was in the SNCF all his life and retired to Cannes, so every summer holiday when I was little, I was shipped out to grandad's to practise French, and so the Var is an area I've always known."

The rugged landscape, outdoor lifestyle and chance to get back to nature were also important factors. "Both Mark and I are very sporty," says Gerry. "We like climbing. We like riding bikes. We like the outdoors and we like forests, hills and mountainous countryside. Var has all of that."

Their search took in an area from Haut-Var-et-Verdon down towards the Mediterranean coast and proved fruitless until they came across an advert for Les Escavalins in the French property magazine

De Particulier à Particulier.

"We came to have a look and as we were winding our way up the rough dirt track towards the property, we stopped and got out of the car to take in the view over the green hills to the sea and the cliffs behind the house. We were struck by the intensity the smell of warm pine, lavender and thyme recalls Gerry, with fondness. "That was it. I fell in love with it."

"Logistically, the location is perfect. Nice Marseille, and the Côte d'Azur are just 25km away, but in Belgentier you can ignore it all when it gets too busy. There are markets all round, and the Haut-Var not far away with its truffle markets; all that authentic Provençal life that people love."

They moved out to France in July 2004 and have spent the intervening 11 years breathing new life into Les Escavalins, which covers nearly 100 acres and is one of four ancient farmhouses in Belgentier that date back to the Middle Ages.

"It has been a heck of a project," says Gerry. "What it said in the advert and what it actually turned out to be were two different things entirely. It was a very dilapidated farmhouse and what had once been a cherry farm, but it was totally overgrown. There were cherries, and apricots, old olives and figs, all derelict; overcome by the forest which was right up to the house, so we couldn't see any of that when we first got here."

Many of the ancient terrace walls, known in French as *restanques*, had collapsed or had been damaged by the droves of wild pigs that roam freely in the surrounding forest. These walls have all now been restored and rebuilt along with the house itself and a little cabin within the property grounds.

"The house is in a *cirque* with the



Gerry and Mark Whitcombe-Power at home with Tati the dog

leading up to the

stunning. It's a little corner of paradise. It really is."

As soon as the house was habitable and the old orchards had been cleared, Gerry and Mark began planting the new olive groves.

"According to the local chamber of agriculture, some of the oldest olive trees here were planted over 1,000 years ago," says Gerry. "We've managed to keep a few of them around the house because it's important for heritage and it looks nice to have a few of these big old trees; but on the actual fields, we were advised to take out the few old, damaged trees which remained and plant from scratch."

With the help of a mini-digger and assistance from friends and family, they now have 2,000 olive trees planted across 17 acres.

"As soon as you come into the main gate, you can see the little olive trees, and" 

"Both Mark and I are very sporty. We like the outdoors and we like forests, hills and mountainous countryside. Var has all of that"

Opposite, clockwise from top:
Les Escavalins in the Var sunshine; collecting the fruits of the olive harvest; sculptures in the garden; local cheeses

they are little at the moment," says Gerry. "They are our babies! We planted them in 2007, and they are just coming true now."

They produced their first batch of AOC Huile d'Olive de Provence, Vierge Extra in 2010, and are now in the process of achieving organic status, a frustrating three-year slog, and something of a formality as chemicals have never been used at Les Escavalins in its long history.

"We have always used organic techniques, such as spraying fine kaolin clay powder on the olives rather than insecticides to stop fruit fly damage," says Gerry. "This place has never had chemicals used on it, and that's our philosophy too. It's why we're here."

The oil is selling well online and through a local market. "The local butcher also sells it, and people can buy it direct from me," says Gerry. "Some local restaurants are starting to ask for it which is very flattering, and we are always looking for bigger outlets."

New for this year is the installation of their own olive mill. They have also cleared an area to plant saffron bulbs, established several beehives and are reintroducing truffles to an area of woodland behind the house.

The olive mill will enable them to harvest in the morning and press the olives in the afternoon to ensure top quality and freshness.

"We'll also be able to pick what's ripe, variety by variety, so we really can work having the highest quality oil," says Gerry. "We'll be able to produce *fruité vert*: fruit green, fresh olive oil; the *fruité noir*, which is the other extreme: quite chocolately, ear almost mushroomy; and in the middle *frûtûr*, which is less peppery. Up to now, we've taken our olives to a mill 45 minutes away and everything goes all together in one pressing, but now we will be able to be more selective. We will be able to pick what we want, when we want, and do small batches."

The oil is also proving popular with their gîte guests, who come from all over the world to experience Gerry and Mark's unique blend of luxury and escapism.

"Our gîte has been carefully restored to retain its original features," says Gerry. "We wanted to replicate what we would like to see if we came to stay: good shower, fresh, crisp bed linen, pure white towels; a touch of luxury without the fuss."

"But it's not all posh and pompous; it's not all frills. It's a really natural environment. Our gîte guests say to us: 'It's amazing how



"The community have been really onside and very supportive of us. It's fabulous. We're very lucky."



Tending to the beehives

many animals we've seen.' And it really is. They see all kinds of birds here: Bonelli's eagles, Grand-duc owls, buzzards, hawks and nightingales; and wild boar, fallow deer and foxes are a treat to see at night.

"It's a complete disconnect; pure escapism; so different from most people's everyday lives," she recounts.

They have been warmly welcomed by their neighbours in Belgentier, a typical Provençal village with a population of 2,000 people in the Gapeau Valley.

Their excellent French, along with their plans to regenerate the farm, immediately won them friends in the local community, and meant that everyone has taken a keen interest in what they've been doing.

"The village thought we were mad but y've been on-board right from the inning," says Gerry. "When we first got e, the house was such a wreck that every ning, we would go down to the village r work, just to get out of a building site. We met a lot of the locals and they took a keen interest in what we were doing and that continues to this day."

They also made the effort to get involved in all aspects of village life, with activities such as training for the French hunting licence and passing the exam, and volunteering with the local Comité Communal Feux de Forêt fire-watch patrol.

"We joined the local hunters for a ple of sessions. It's not really our bag but ... live in an authentic Provençal community and many people who live here are keen hunters, so it was only right as landowners that we should show willing," says Gerry. "And we joined the local CCFF because it's important to help out. The community have been really onside and very supportive of us. It's fabulous. We're very lucky."

In truth, it's far more likely that it's the heroic efforts this visionary pair have made to bring Les Escavalins back to life that have endeared them to their neighbours, and here's hoping they enjoy health and happiness in their picturesque corner of France for many years to come. **LF**

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Ask the agent

No one knows the area like a local estate agent. We asked **Hans Huygens**, of Agence Bird, for the inside track on Var

What's the cheapest property you have on your books right now?

We have about 400 properties on our books, but the cheapest one we have in our area is a studio located in a typical old town house for €120,000.

How much would you expect to pay for:

- a detached property with land in good condition?

This is a very difficult question since price levels will depend on where the property is located. Prices will vary from about €500,000 up to a couple of million near the coastal areas and even more for those with magnificent sea views.

• a three-bedroom townhouse?

If you're looking for a three-bedroom town house with a garden, prices start from about €350,000, depending on the condition of the property.

• a renovation opportunity?

The amount you'd expect to pay depends on the size of the property and the amount of land. We currently have a small house to restore, close to the beach and with a



splendid sea view, for €890,000. Its location is exceptional and is a real opportunity.

Is there a typical architecture or style in Var?

We are located in the middle of the Provence, so the Provençal style is the most frequently seen. However, over the last couple of years we have seen a trend of very modern new villas being built.

Why do British people buy houses in Var?

Since we are based in the gulf of Saint-Tropez, I should say it is fairly obvious! We have the best and the most renowned beaches of the Mediterranean and easy access via the international airports of Nice, Toulon and Marseille. Statistically we have more than 310 days of sunshine per year. Our area is blessed with good shopping possibilities, great restaurants, bars, golf courses, great landscapes, white sandy beaches... and much more!

What are your predictions for the property market in Var?

The pound/euro exchange rate is a blessing for all those who wish to buy property,

especially as we are now at the bottom of the real estate market. It is not the cheapest area but it offers a certain value for money, and over the long run is one of the best investments you can make.

What are the regional specialities?

Rosé! The rosé wine is definitely the local speciality. You will find numerous wine-châteaux everywhere. And, of course, the local markets where local people display and sell their homemade goodies.

Describe Var in five words.

The best in the world!

What's your favourite corner of Var?

I love my little town of Sainte-Maxime. It is ideally located in the gulf of Saint-Tropez and is only 10 minutes from Saint-Tropez via the boat shuttle service and about 50 minutes from Nice airport. We have all the amenities - shops, restaurants and much more, to hand - and it is a place that is lived in year-round. I like nothing more than sitting in my favourite beach restaurant overlooking the white beaches and the blue sea while having a meal.

www.agencebird.co.uk

VAR is it right for you?

Property prices

Var is the second most expensive department in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur with an average resale price of €305,000 compared to the regional average of €290,000.

Weather

Var enjoys a Mediterranean climate with long hot summers, mild winters and more than 300 days of sunshine a year. The Mistral winds affect this area of France but can provide a welcome breeze in the summer.

Activities

With more than 400 kilometres of coastline, including Saint-Tropez, Hyères and the Porquerolles islands, Var offers plenty for those longing for the Med. The capital city of Toulon boasts a superb harbour, which is the main base of the French Navy, and a number of traditional Provençal food markets. As well as seaside resorts, Var is home to vast swathes of forest and mountains due to its position in the foothills of the Alps and can claim part of the iconic Gorges du Verdon.



FACT FILE



Region: Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

Department: Var

Capital: Toulon

CityJet and Flybe operate flights from London to Toulon and a number of airlines fly to the nearby airports of Nice and Marseille.

Eurostar to Paris and then TGV to Toulon which takes just less than four hours.

For driving times consult one of the many online route planners such as those at www.viamichelin.com, www.mappy.com and www.theaa.com

What can I get for my money?

With glamorous Riviera resorts, beautiful countryside, Provençal villas and plenty of sunshine, Var is popular with property buyers. Here are a selection of properties to tempt you



€85,000

1 In a gated plot in a quiet area near Grimaud, this mobile home enjoys great views. There are shops within walking distance and the beaches are a couple of miles away. It offers a double bedroom, a bathroom, a fitted kitchen, a living room, a mature garden with parking and lockable storage sheds.

Contact: Private Seller
katherine.tillotson@yahoo.co.uk



€270,000

2 Situated in a gated residence with a shared pool, this first-floor apartment is near the coastal town of Sainte-Maxime. There are two bedrooms, two bathrooms, an equipped kitchen and an open living and dining room which opens out onto a terrace with space for a table and chairs. There are two parking spaces.

Contact: Agence Bird
www.agencebird.co.uk



€357,000

3 This two-bedroom apartment is situated near the harbour in Fréjus, close to the sandy Mediterranean beaches. The apartment is 67m² in a large building of apartments and comprises an open-plan kitchen and living room, two bedrooms, a bathroom, a large garage and a south-facing terrace.

Contact: My French House
www.my-french-house.com



€499,800

4 This detached villa near Fayence is set in 2,000m² of mature gardens with a recently installed pool and several outbuildings. The villa has three bedrooms, two bathrooms and an open-plan L-shaped living room with a country style kitchen and a dining area. The living room has patio doors opening out onto an elevated terrace.

Contact: Leggett Immobilier
www.leggettfrance.com



€540,000

5 This terraced villa in Les Issambres enjoys beautiful sea views from the garden and terrace and is less than two kilometres from the beach. In a residential estate with a shared pool and a caretaker, the villa has four bedrooms, three bathrooms and an open-plan kitchen, living and dining room.

Contact: Agence Bird
www.agencebird.co.uk



€645,000

6 On the outskirts of Bagnols-en-Forêt, this villa is within walking distance of the local shops and restaurants and only 10 miles from the coast and the resorts of Fréjus and Saint-Raphaël. There are four en-suite bedrooms, an open-plan kitchen/living/dining room, a large heated pool and gardens including established olive and fig trees.

Contact: La Résidence
www.laresidence.co.uk



These pages, clockwise from above: the couple's ice cream parlour Scaramouche in Céreste; their courtyard; Elizabeth and her husband Gwendal

The inside scoop

A move to Provence and the creation of a successful ice cream business offers author Elizabeth Bard plenty of inspiration, discovers **Emma Rawle**

Meet a handsome Frenchman, move to Paris and marry him... It may sound like the plot of a novel, but for New Yorker Elizabeth Bard, this is exactly what happened; but after eight happy years as a twenty-something in the French capital, she was able to fulfil a different dream and move to Provence to live in a small village and raise a family in the Provençal countryside.

Those of you who read Elizabeth's first book *Lunch in Paris* may be surprised to learn that the city girl, who was born and raised in New York, studied in London and lived in Paris, suddenly upped sticks and moved to the countryside. It was certainly a big leap into the unknown, but for Elizabeth, her French husband Gwendal and their seven-year-old son Augustin (given the pseudonym Alexandre in her second book *Picnic in Provence*), it has turned out to be one of the best decisions they've made.

"We weren't looking to leave Paris, we really weren't," says Elizabeth. "We found the house in Provence in 2009,

very much by accident, and we just decided to pack up everything. It was probably the craziest thing either one of us has ever done! I'm a city girl, so the idea of living in a village with just 1,300 people was head-spinning for me. But it really has turned out to be a wonderful choice for us."

Moving to Provence certainly was a spur-of-the-moment decision, taken after a chance visit to a house in the small village of Céreste, not far from Avignon and Aix-en-Provence, which was the wartime base of French poet and Resistance leader René Char.

"I was six months pregnant and didn't want to fly, so we decided to holiday in France for Easter," explains Elizabeth. "My husband was reading a biography of René Char, whose poetry he really admires, and so we decided to go to the village where he lived during the war and ran his Resistance network: Céreste."

A conversation with their B&B hosts in Céreste led to a meeting with Char's daughter Mirielle, who still lived in the village. Over several coffees with Mirielle, they discovered that her family still owned Char's house and during a tour of



“The neighbourliness of the village was a real journey of discovery for me”

the quirky property, they learned that the family were thinking of selling it.

“Gwendal and I didn’t even exchange one look,” says Elizabeth. “We got out of the house and walked back to the B&B and then we spent this crazy night in front of a spreadsheet trying to figure out if we could swing it. The next day we went back to them and asked if we could buy the house. Within a year, the baby was born, I had my first book launch, Gwendal decided he would work from a distance and we sort of packed up lock, stock and barrel and moved to Provence.”

Céreste could hardly be further from Paris, both in terms of distance and lifestyle, and living there has been a real journey of discovery for Elizabeth. “The neighbourliness of the village is something that was a real discovery for me,” she says. “I’d never had real neighbours before, the





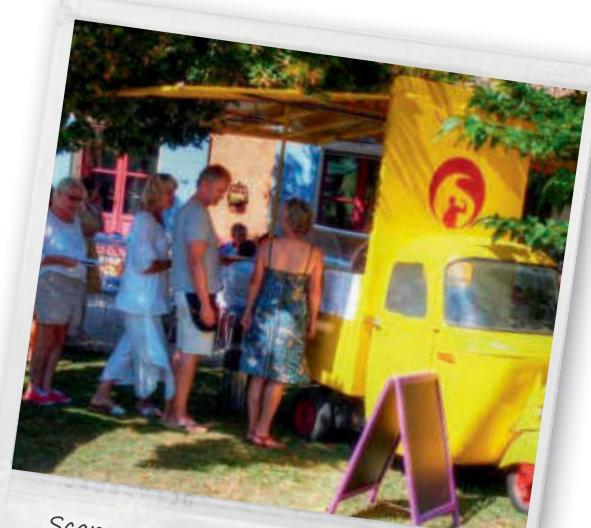
This page, from top:
the stylish interior; a
family stroll

Opposite page,
from top:
making use of the
fresh produce;
pumpkin and
courgette flowers;
Elizabeth enjoys
cooking with the
local Provençal
produce

kind you sit out on the stoop and talk to. You can't just walk down the street in your own world. I once had an American friend, who came to stay, and one morning I walked down the street together and I had to say 'bonjour' to every single person on the street! You know half of them by name and everyone by sight; it's that kind of place."

The impulsive move south has benefitted the whole family, especially their son Augustin, who has grown up in the Provençal countryside with what sounds like an idyllic lifestyle.

"He's certainly had experiences I never had growing in New York," says Elizabeth. "It's so different... He's adopted a goat! I never had a pet goat. It's such a safe, warm, cocoon-like environment where he knows a lot of people and people know him. I think for his early childhood experience, it's been really magical."



Scaramouche ice cream parlour on the road



Their ice cream has become very popular with locals and visitors

France is not only a great place to grow up but also a great place to be a parent, as Elizabeth discovered when she had her son. "I think I'm very fortunate to be living in the French system in terms of raising a family," she says. "This is a country really made for it; the whole culture is centred around the family. There is free pre-school, subsidised day care, five days in hospital after giving birth just to get acclimated... When you have a child in France, you understand why you pay your taxes! It's a very reasonable and well-balanced environment, certainly for me as a working mother."

It seems a miracle that Elizabeth can find the time to raise a child. Not only is she a successful author but she and Gwendal have opened an ice cream shop, Scaramouche, in Céreste, which was recently voted the third best ice cream parlour in France on TripAdvisor. It has been so successful that they have just opened another branch in the Montmartre area of Paris (over 400 miles away).

The small village of Céreste, relatively unknown to tourists, seems an unlikely place for a successful ice cream parlour, but the couple were determined to stay local and through word of mouth, they have created a place that people will travel to just for the ice cream.

"Everyone thought we were crazy!" laughs Elizabeth. "Céreste isn't a chic sort of village. It's not where all the



Scaramouche in Céreste was recently voted the third best ice cream parlour in France on TripAdvisor

Parisians come for the summer or where all the tourists stop; it's a real place where people actually live all year-round. But we wanted to do something local that would allow us to share the amazing flavours we've discovered here, and just something that would be fun for us, and would be good for the village, and good for the community."

Through hard work and a bit of lateral thinking, they have managed to turn Scaramouche into a year-round business, with their thick hot chocolate and *bûche de Noël glacée* especially popular in the winter.

Gwendal is an engineer by training, although he had been working in the cinema business in Paris, so he is in charge of the scientific process of creating the ice cream flavours while Elizabeth describes her role as 'taster-in-chief' - a job she takes very seriously.

"We did about six months of vanilla testing," laughs Elizabeth. "The classics have to be perfect before you can go on to invent more wild flavours. We also have two kinds of strawberry ice cream: strawberry sorbet, which is the hot pink kind the French love, and I insisted we also make the kind of strawberry ice cream I grew up with, which is more the English-style of strawberries and cream, with chunks of





“I realised that almost everything I had learned about France, I had learned ‘autour de la table’”

These pages, clockwise from above:
the village medieval festival; Céreste;
local strawberries;
produce at the market

strawberries in it. We had a little battle about the strawberry but we have both.”

It isn't really surprising that Elizabeth is so passionate about the ice cream business. Food has been an integral part of her life ever since she moved to France, as those who have read her books will know. They are interspersed with recipes from different times in her life.

“I always knew that I was going to write something about the rollercoaster ride of international living,” explains Elizabeth. “When I sat down to decide how to do it and how to structure it, I realised that almost everything I had learned about France, I had learned ‘autour de la table’ - sitting around the table.

“There are a couple of years before you become fluent in a language when you do feel half-there. You're half-funny, half-charming, half-intelligent, half-everything because you can't express yourself properly and that was really difficult for me. You find other ways to express your personality and



for me that was through cooking. Cooking is a way for you to welcome people without having to talk to them!”

After living in France for 13 years, Elizabeth now feels thoroughly at home, but with a business to develop and run and a child to raise, the next 13 years are likely to be as eventful as the last. That should provide plenty of material for the third book! **LF**
www.elizabethbard.com

***Picnic in Provence*, Elizabeth Bard, £8.99, Summersdale Publishers Ltd**



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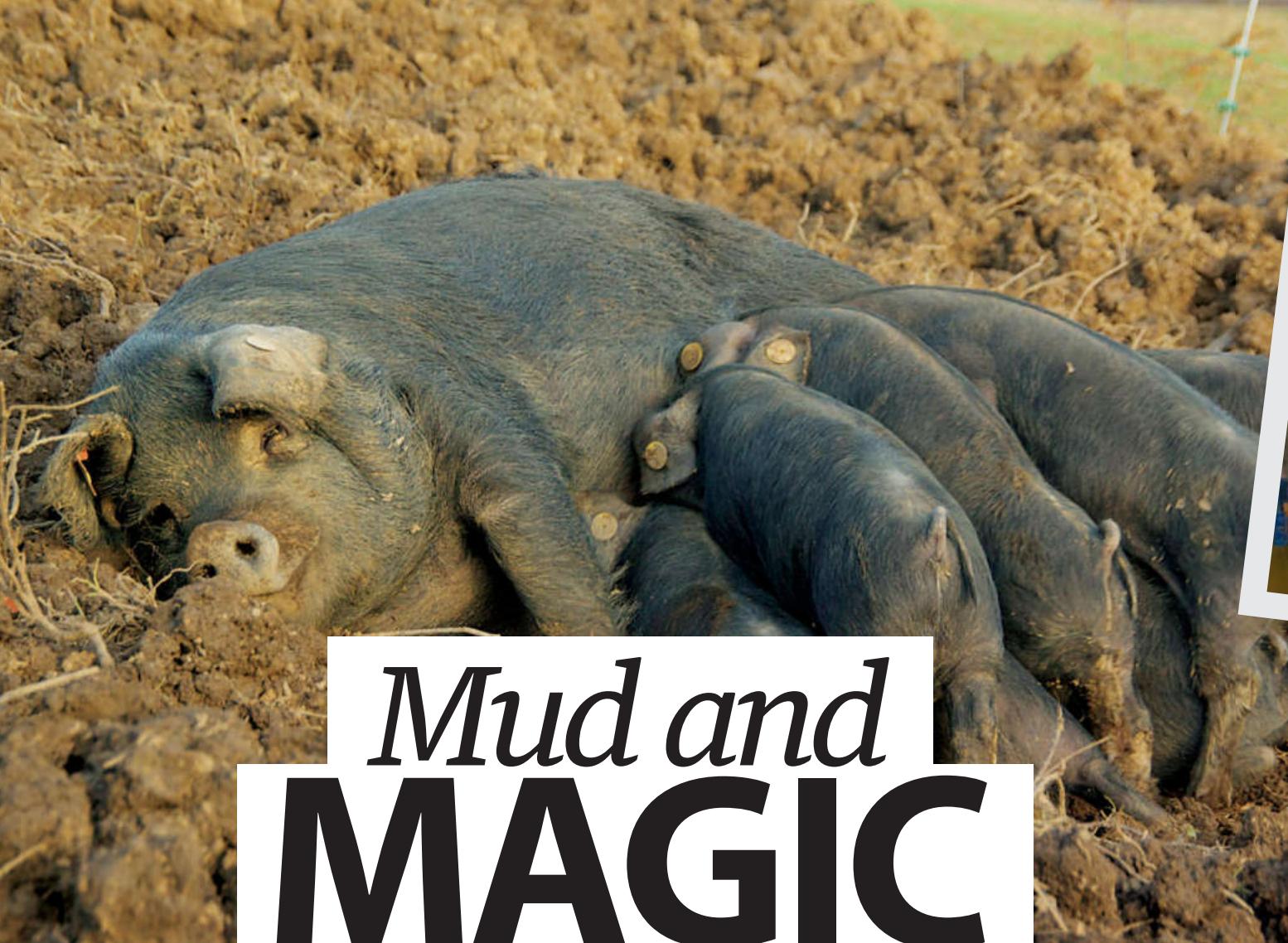
ELIZABETH'S ADVICE ON INTER-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

Being married to a Frenchman has introduced Elizabeth to cultural differences, but she firmly believes it has enriched both of their lives, although patience and understanding are key to making it work.

"Having the two cultures makes you automatically more open-minded. You can't assume anything, you have to examine each little fact and experience as it arrives, and that makes you more open to the world and more open to new experiences. When you live in another culture you discover that there is no such thing as normal!"

"When I first moved to France, Gwendal came into the apartment one day and, with quite a sense of occasion, announced that he had put me on the gas bill... And I thought 'Ok, well that's romantic!' but of course, had I been French, I would have understood what that meant: because you don't exist in France until you have your name on a utility bill. It was almost like a pre-proposal! We were already living together, but I think putting me on the gas bill was probably a bigger step towards marriage than the actual moving in together was. I didn't realise at the time what a momentous occasion it was."





Mud and MAGIC

Louisa and Stuart Hallewell are living 'The Good Life' running an organic pig farm in Midi-Pyrénées. **Scheenagh Harrington** shares their success story



One of the many reasons people move to France is the search for a better quality of life; somewhere they can be more self-sufficient and feel closer to nature.

That was certainly the aim for 44-year-old Louisa Hallewell and her family, who moved from Oxfordshire to the countryside of south-west France in 2007, where they now run Enjouanisson, their organic pig farm. While they left in search of 'The Good Life', the shift in lifestyle has seen some interesting scenarios thrown their way over the years - least of which included a milestone celebration for Louisa, where the birthday girl's plans went somewhat awry thanks to their new rural responsibilities.

"I spent my 40th birthday in a barn," she laughs.

"Everyone else was having a cracking party in the kitchen, and I was in the barn, bottle-feeding a baby lamb that had been abandoned by its mum!"

Louisa, who was a podiatrist and reflexologist before moving to France with her 47-year-old, IT worker husband, Stuart, and their two children - nine-year-old daughter Harmonie, and eight-year-old son Phoenix - admits they had thought of emigrating years earlier, but a lack of confidence with the language and hearing horror stories put them off.

Yet the notion of moving away from their UK home in Thame and living self-sufficiently in France was always



Opposite pages, clockwise from top left: contented sow and piglets; Louisa proudly selling produce at a farmers' market; organic ham; feeding piglets; Louisa, Stuart, Harmonie and Phoenix



The quest for a greener lifestyle meant going organic, but on a reasonably small scale

there, as she explains: "The dream was my husband's. He didn't want to bring the children up in the UK and he also suffered from winter sadness. There was a definite need to go and find some sunshine, and bring the kids up in a more healthy, organic, outdoor lifestyle than the one we could see in the commuter belt in England."

A previous attempt to make the leap across the Channel went nowhere after their house failed to sell, but in 2007, shortly after welcoming their second child, events seemed to take on a life of their own. A note slipped through their door enquired whether their home was for sale.

"It wasn't," said Louisa. "I'd just given birth, my husband was in Ireland; I was home alone with two small babies and trying to run a business. I wasn't really planning on selling the house at that time."

Despite all that, she quickly came to the conclusion it was too good an opportunity to miss. "Maybe it was because I was sleep deprived, but I thought it was a brilliant idea to change country. I actually did no rational thinking about it!" she laughs.

After selling up and finally making it to French soil, the family literally put a pin in the map, rented a gîte and said, 'right, this is where it starts'.

The quest for a greener lifestyle meant going organic, but on a reasonably small scale. "Ideally we were just going to be self-sufficient, doing a bit of 'The Good Life,'" says Louisa. "Organic is incredibly important to us, and the whole thing of knowing the provenance of your food. The idea was to try to live this wonderful dream of me being

Barbara Good and Stuart being Tom Good, having a few pigs and chickens and living in the sunshine happily ever after, with our babies running around being free!"

The reality, however, turned out to be rather different. As the family searched for their new home, hoping for a smallholding or similar, it became increasingly obvious that they weren't going to find what they were looking for with local estate agents.

Luckily, they stumbled on Safer (Sociétés d'aménagement foncier et d'établissement rural), the government body for land sales in France. "We contacted them and that's how we started looking at properties that had more than a few hectares of land," explains Louisa. "The more we looked, the more the ideas of what we could do seemed more exciting - the dream got bigger."

It took two years, but in 2009, the Hallewells finally found their perfect home in Montesquiou, in the Gers department of Midi-Pyrénées. Louisa explains: "We first saw this place when we first moved over to France. We had seen it for sale through an agent and said 'Fifty hectares! No, we're not doing that thank you' and discounted it completely. Two years later though, we did go to view it and 



These pages, clockwise from top left: Stuart and a prize piglet; the idyllic rural setting; organic sausages; young piglets finding their feet



the environment is absolutely stunning: 360-degree uninterrupted views of mountains and beautiful countryside. The property had been on the market for about five years, so we made a ridiculously cheap offer and they accepted it. We can see the Pyrénées on a regular basis. It makes my heart sing every morning."

The dream was now starting to be a reality, but before they could really get up and running, there was a lot of work to do. The first order of business was to clean the place up. "It was a crazy, crazy property!" laughs Louisa. "It was extremely run down and had animals living in it all over the place. There were 40 cats, nine dogs and a pig living in the house. My mum's words were: 'You're a lot braver than I thought you were' when we brought her to visit for the first time, because it really could have been condemned!"

Thanks to the hard graft of family and friends, as well as a lot of bleach, Louisa and Stuart were able to make the farmhouse habitable in a fortnight.

After expending all that elbow grease, it was time to sift into another gear mentally, and attack the admin that comes with running an organic farm in France. Louisa explains: "The first thing on the paperwork side was being registered as farmers, and getting our documentation done for subsidies. If you don't get your paperwork done then you don't get any subsidies for that year, and they're not to be sniffed at!"

luckily, they had local support. "An agent for Safer helped us," says Louisa, adding: "He's retired now, but raised six children on an organic farm self-sufficiently, living out here for 30 years. He's a bit of a guru. There are quite a few of them out here, and they're generally Dutch or German. Without them we'd have been floundering."

That good relationship with their neighbours proved to be a godsend on many an occasion, with Louisa and Stuart calling on the locals for advice, guidance and, from time to time, to borrow equipment. She explains: "You come to France with this idea you're going to create a farm and think it's going to be fabulous because you see all these French families living the life, but they've been doing it for generations.

"If you don't get on with your neighbours it's horrific. I know people who don't and it's almost gang war. They have a really hard time. For us, what really helped us integrate was the fact we had two small babies and we enrolled them

"If you don't get your paperwork done then you don't get any subsidies for that year"



straight into *maternelle*. I joined the school council as well."

Louisa stresses the importance of this most social of networks, saying: "I think there's a secret code in the countryside: if your neighbour asks you for help, then the answer is always yes, regardless of whether it's inconvenient for you. In the UK, I think we've forgotten how to ask our neighbours for help, because we just expect to pay someone to do something. We've forgotten how to say, 'Look, can you help me?' and that it's okay to ask. If you don't do it here, you won't survive."

So, once the farmhouse had been made habitable, and the all-important paperwork was in place, the family were then able to welcome their first animals. "The pigs arrived about two months after we got there," Louisa says. "I think a chicken and some chicks were the first thing to arrive, then we bought ten weaners - pigs that are about eight to ten weeks old, who had been weaned off their mother's milk and were eating solid food."

After letting the pigs work their magic on the area that would go on to be a vegetable patch, turning it over as efficiently as any tractor, she and Stuart made new enclosures in the farm's woodlands.

"We've got 13 hectares of oak woodlands and enclosed part of it to accommodate more pigs. That same year, we bought two pregnant sows in the June. We had to build some pig sties as we didn't have any, so we learned to do block walling."

It turned out to be one of many lessons, some more difficult than others, that Louisa and Stuart have learned in the past few years, but when it comes to sending her beloved animals to slaughter, it's not as much of a



DO'S AND DON'TS FOR LIVING THE GOOD LIFE IN FRANCE...

DO...

- ...your research. Louisa advises new farmers to stick to raising one main animal for the first few years. Make sure you know what livestock you want to raise before buying land. Take the time to find out how much work they will require, what it will cost and – fundamentally – that they are suitable for where you're going to live.
- Be friendly! "If you've got neighbours, the most important thing is to introduce yourselves, invite them round and let them know what you're doing," says Louisa. "Try to be as amenable and welcoming as possible because having your neighbours as friends is a godsend."

DON'T...

- ...forget to plan in some downtime. The farming year is a busy one, from springtime lambing to autumn harvesting, so plan in a break. However, if going away you'll need someone to care for your animals.
- ...get your animals in before you have the grain to feed them. "If you're going to have a number of animals to feed on a daily basis, then you need to have a harvest in first," warns Louisa, who admits she did it the other way around and paid a fortune for organic feed. "Sow your seed, get some grain in and make some silos to store your seed."





“We’ve got 13 hectares of oak woodland and enclosed part of it to accommodate more pigs”

wrench as imagined.

“I’ve hardened a lot over the past six years. You have to,” says Louisa. “I have a deep respect for my animals, and I know that while they’re alive and with me, they have the highest quality standard of farm life they could possibly have. I treat them well. In return, they give me a product that I can sell, so I can live.”

She adds: “I remember the first time someone showed me how to pluck and gut a chicken. I was absolutely horrified. Now I do it on a weekly basis. It’s just part of normal life. It’s the provenance of our food. We’re making quality food to feed our family and it’s the main reason we’re here. We take pride in the fact we’ve raised really

good quality food to eat. So there are lots of positives.”

As well as the Hallewell family and all their animals, Enjouanisson regularly opens its doors to local children attending cookery workshops or adults keen to learn more about the world of organic farming. “It’s been an amazing roller coaster: lots and lots of fun,” says Louisa.

There’s no doubt Enjouanisson has a long and profitable future ahead of it, selling delicious meat to a growing base of customers, both online and at various farmers’ markets. The life the family have chosen and created in France is definitely not for the work shy or the faint-hearted but it is certainly a ‘Good Life’. LF

www.enjouanisson.fr

This page:
from IT worker to
budding farmer,
Stuart feeds his pigs

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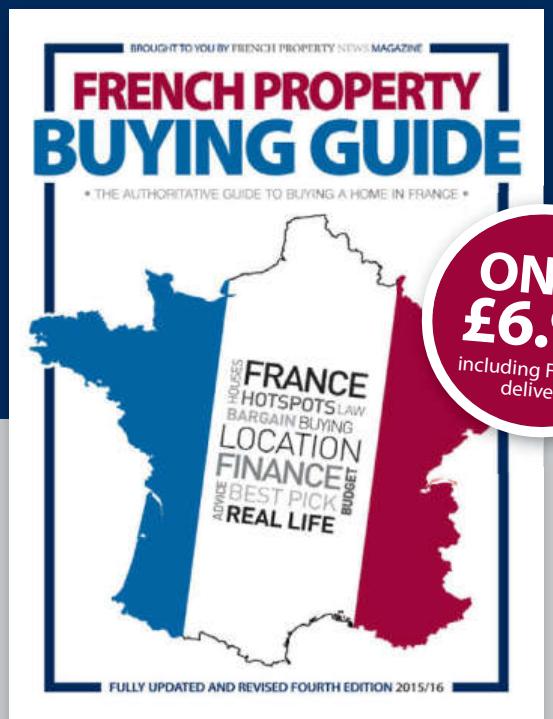
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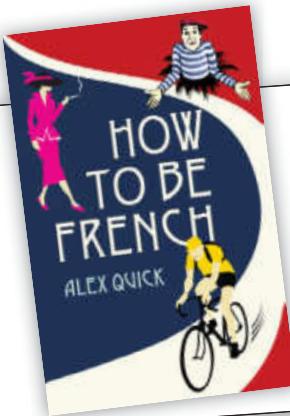


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A slice of French life: food & drink

We lift the lid on aspects of life in France

While many have pondered what makes the French culture so unique, author Alex Quick has given form to his thoughts with his humorous new book *How to be French*. In the first of a three-part series featuring extracts from the book, Alex reveals the French food and drink etiquette.

ALEX QUICK: AUTHOR Q&A

Q: What's your background with regards to France?

A: It began when I spent a year learning French for work, and then a further year in Brittany when I was putting my French into practice.

Q: How did you choose what to write about?

A: I had a wonderful French co-author, Cyn Bataille. We got together and roughed out the entire book, then we ran the result past some French friends, who passed the whole thing, though not without a Gallic shrug that an Englishman should even be attempting to write on the subject!

Q: What have you learned from writing the book?

A: I have been fascinated by the way that France has numerous regional languages. Their histories and cultures are fascinating. France is so multifarious and pluralistic and I think this can only be a good thing.

"TALK ABOUT FOOD"

Why not start where the French themselves would start? That is, with food?

There is a very telling moment in *Asterix and the Olympic Games* - written, of course, by that great French genius René Goscinny - when Asterix and Obelix are dining with the Gaulish Olympic team at a restaurant in Greece. As they tuck into their stuffed vine leaves, Obelix says to Asterix: 'Do you remember the little restaurant in Lugdunum where we had that delicious veal?'

For the French, food is the greatest of all topics of conversation, and there is no better time to talk about food than when one is engaged in eating it. Regional specialities, the best way to prepare a certain dish, legendary meals of yore, impossible-to-obtain ingredients, the best markets, chefs, wines, vegetarianism and its perverseness: the range of topics is effectively unbounded. It's surprising the French talk about anything else, and sometimes they don't.

A famous experiment was carried out in which a group of Americans and a group of French were shown a picture of a chocolate cake and asked what emotion it elicited. The Americans, predominantly, said 'guilt', and the French, predominantly, said 'celebration'. That really says it all. American puritanism seeks to mortify and tame the body; French sensuality seeks to indulge and celebrate it. And the French still wind up thinner than the Americans. How do they pull that off?

Perhaps it's because the French sit down to eat, enjoy it, take it seriously



a slice of french life: food and drink



“For the French, food is the greatest of all topics of conversation”



and regard it as a way to spend time with friends and family. They savour it, they know about it, they appreciate it. They don't snack all day, alone, on foods that have little intrinsic interest or personality.

Not to have an opinion about food, or to regard it as mere fuel, is the purest form of French nihilism.

EAT THINGS THAT LOOK LIKE THINGS

In Anglophone lands, we prefer to eat things that look nothing like things. In France, they are not so squeamish. Witness *tête de veau*. This is a real calf's head, reclining in a dish and looking dejected.

Then there are snails. These look like snails, and to add insult to injury are usually served in their own homes. The snail goes through a purging process, being fed various cleansing ingredients for a few days (which seems a little strange, since any ingredients fed to a snail still turn to snail excrement), before being removed from their shells, killed, cooked, and replaced courteously in their shells with garlic

and butter. Snails are naturally low in fat and high in protein, though if served in butter, the ratio is reversed.

Frogs' legs look like the legs of frogs, and taste of chicken. To kill and remove the legs from any animal - the killing is often simultaneous with, and caused by, the leg removal - and then blithely claim it tastes like another animal, is surely a terrible insult: a frog, if it could defend itself, would surely claim that it tastes like a frog. In recent years, at an archaeological dig at Amesbury in Wiltshire, a midden was uncovered containing hundreds of frog leg bones dating back to the seventh millennium BC: the British are thus the original 'frogs'.

Or bone marrow. This is the 'meat butter' of beef or veal: it is cooked in the animal bone, which is longitudinally halved and garnished with mustard seeds, garlic and herbs, then served with garlic bread and salad. It's completely delicious - as long as you don't mind being reminded that you are eating an animal.

GOTO A MARKET

The French market is not the pale phenomenon we are used to in the UK, with its worthy attempt to create a culture of 'local' producers in opposition to the dominance of the supermarket, which in reality has everything very nicely sewn up, thank you - it's a real tradition, alive in every French town and every French soul. Le marché is where one tastes, smells, hears, feels and sees France. In this, it beats the most French of all other French things.

Markets are generally held once a week in most towns, though in some cases twice a week or more. The largest markets are special concerns known as *foires* (fairs) and take place on former religious occasions a few times a year. Covered markets (*marchés couverts*) also exist on a permanent

basis, with stall holders specialising in every conceivable commodity (clothes, pictures, cheeses, olives, eggs, potatoes, honey, hats, pottery, tools, wine, flowers, books, chicks).

Some markets have a national fame: among them are the book market at Parc George Brassens in Paris, the flower market in Nice, the contemporary art market at Place de la Bastille in Paris, the fish market at Marseilles, the flea market at Place Saint Sulpice in Paris, and the stamp market at Avenue de Marigny in Paris.

The French love to browse, to prod, to finger, to disparage and finally to buy. And at noon everyone packs up for a long lunch, hypnotizing themselves with food and wine into a deep and endless afternoon.

IGNORE THE FRENCH PARADOX

'The French paradox' is the observation that French people typically consume higher than average amounts of saturated fats, which are strongly associated with coronary heart disease, yet suffer from substantially lower rates of said coronary heart disease. In very rough terms, the French consume about 25% more saturated fats (in the form of soft cheeses, butter and fatty meat) than the Americans or British, but suffer from about 25% less heart disease.

When this was first noticed in the 1980s, there was a frenzy of interest throughout the world in exactly how the French were getting away with it. In America, it was claimed that the prophylactic factor was red wine. The US consumption of red wine quadrupled overnight, as Americans forced themselves to drink the filthy stuff as a health food. Vitamin K2 was also implicated (the only vitamin named after a mountain), since K2 can be found in Brie de Meaux and foie gras. Other explanations involved smaller portion sizes, statistical incompetence, low sugar intake, herbal tea, not eating while watching TV, smoking plenty of cigarettes and saying 'ooh la la' occasionally. In fact, it was open season for anyone who wanted to write a book giving the reasons why French women don't get fat, old, ugly or develop varicose veins, and later, why French children don't have tantrums and why everyone in France is having so many orgasms that it is surprising their features are not twisted into a permanent rictus of ecstasy.

The only people who don't care about the French paradox are the French themselves, who have nothing to gain from finding out why, or indeed if, it exists.

ENJOY L'HEURE DE L'APÉRO

L'heure de l'apéro is 'apéro hour' or 'the hour of the aperitif'. *Apéritif* becomes *apéro* as *intellectuel* becomes *intello*, *vétérinaire* becomes *véto* and *hôpital* becomes *hôsto*.

What does *apéritif* mean, at its root? Well, it comes from the Latin verb *aperire*, to open, which also gives us the name of the month of April (the month that 'opens' the way to spring). The *apéritif* is thus the opening move in the protracted chess game that is the French dinner.

However, an *apéro* is not something that you gulp back quickly before tucking in. The French, with their customary attention to the pleasures of the body, and their understanding of the way anticipation sharpens appetite in a variety of contexts, have elongated the act of having a snifter into 60 minutes. *L'heure de l'apéro* is the time spent between

knocking off work (or, at weekends, recovering from a long lunch) and starting the evening meal. It is a time taken with friends at a café, riverbank, bar, etc, quite separate from the time taken at the restaurant or home where you will later dine. It is a prequel, but in a different cinema.

L'heure de l'apéro is an hour the French have created and demarcated for themselves, and is consequently an hour in which they feel the most French; there isn't really any English equivalent to *l'heure de l'apéro*. 'Having a pint with your mates after work' doesn't cut it. The actual *apéro* in question could be anything – a glass of rosé, a cocktail, a pastis, etc – which you could, though it is not usual, refer to as a *rosé*, *cockto* or *pasto*.

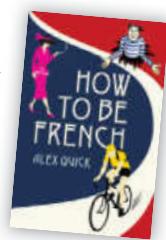
LINK GLASSES AND MAKE EYE CONTACT

In France, when you clink glasses to toast one another, you are also supposed to look one another in the eye. Not to do so is to invite bad luck; it is also to demonstrate one's spiritual absence during this most important of encounters. After all, it is an encounter in which one traditionally wishes one's fellow drinker *bonne santé*, or 'good health'. Not to look them in the eye at this time is essentially to say: 'I care little for you or your health, or for this moment of fellowship between us; you don't really exist for me, and in fact you are trash, and I wouldn't visit you in hospital or attend your funeral, the date and circumstances of which are of no interest to me.'

Clinking is an interesting custom. Why do we clink? And why do the French clink more than the British? A Briton will often just raise his glass, look at nothing in particular, say 'cheers' and gulp it down. The French, on the other hand, love to clink. Apparently it derives from a medieval custom. In former times it was quite possible that your host had poisoned your wine. In order to demonstrate that this was not so, the host would tip a portion of his wine into your glass (or beaker), and you would tip a portion of yours into his. The contact between the lips of the respective glasses or beakers as this was performed gave rise to the custom of clinking; rather than mix the wines together, one could symbolically clink as a mark of trust.

It would be amusing to pour one's wine into a Frenchman's wine glass these days and watch the expression on his face." **LN**

● Taken from *How to be French*, Alex Quick with Cyn Bataille (Old Street Publishing, £8.99)



NEXT MONTH...

ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR

What's the protocol for how many cheek kisses to greet with? And why are strikes in France so seemingly commonplace? Find out in part two of our three-part series.



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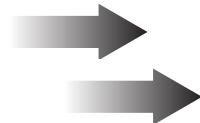
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À LA MAISON

This month: A regional tour of France through the country's diverse cuisine; try a recipe for *baba au rhum*; wines to match and gardening in France



French-trained chef Gabriel Gaté spends two months every spring travelling around France and discovering the gastronomic specialities of the different regions for his television show *Taste Le Tour* with Gabriel Gaté. His new cookbook *A Cook's Tour of France* brings together a selection of those recipes, from an alpine *tartiflette* to *canelés* from Bordeaux, to showcase the best of French cuisine and the diversity of its gastronomy.

Read on for five delicious recipes from *A Cook's Tour of France* 

A Cook's Tour of France: Regional French recipes, by Gabriel Gaté, £20, Hardie Grant



CANTAL CREAM WITH WILD MUSHROOM TOASTS

Crème de Cantal et son toast de cèpes

From the Auvergne Region

by Francis Delmas

Serves 6

Ingredients

- 80g (3oz) sugar
- 2 tablespoons water
- 80g (3oz) rhubarb, cut into 1cm (½in) pieces
- 1 teaspoon butter
- 100ml (3½fl oz) pouring cream
- 150g (5oz) cantal cheese, grated
- 4 eggs
- 400ml (14fl oz) hot milk
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 200g (7oz) cep mushrooms, sliced
- freshly ground pepper
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 100g (3½oz) extra cantal cheese, cut into small pieces
- 6 x 1cm (½in) thick slices of baguette, 15cm (6in) long
- 12 cherry tomatoes

Method

- 1 Preheat the oven to 140°C (280°F/Gas 1).
- 2 In a small saucepan, bring the sugar and water to the boil and cook until it is a light-brown caramel colour.
- 3 Pour the caramel into 6 x 100ml (3½fl oz) porcelain ramekins.
- 4 Cook the rhubarb in the butter in a small saucepan until soft, then spoon the rhubarb into the ramekins.
- 5 Combine the cream, cheese and eggs in a blender. Add the hot milk and blend again. Pour this custard into the ramekins and place them in a roasting pan. Add enough hot water to the pan to come halfway up the sides of the ramekins.
- 6 Cook the custards in the oven for about 20 minutes or until set. Remove from the oven and allow to cool.
- 7 Heat half the olive oil in a frying pan and cook the mushrooms for a few minutes. Season with pepper and a little chopped garlic.
- 8 Alternate slices of mushroom and cantal cheese on the slices of baguette, then place under a grill and cook until the cheese has melted.
- 9 To unmould, run a knife blade around the inside edge of the ramekins and turn the cantal creams out onto plates. Top with a slice of cheese and mushroom toast, garnish with cherry tomatoes and drizzle the remaining olive oil over the top.

Cantal cheese has been made in the mountainous region of Auvergne for more than a thousand years. This wonderful hard cheese, sharp and nutty, resembles a cheddar and is a great cheese to cook with



CHEESE FONDUE LES ALPAGES

Fondue les Alpages

From the Alps Region

by Bernard Mure-Ravaud

Serves 4-8

Ingredients

- 400g (14oz) beaufort cheese
- 200g (7oz) abondance cheese
- 400g (14oz) comté cheese
- 250ml (8½fl oz/1 cup) dry white wine
- A one-day-old baguette, cut into 1cm (½in) slices

Method

- 1 Trim the rind of all the cheeses and grate them very finely. Don't compress the grated cheese.
- 2 Place half the wine in a fondue pan on low heat. Add about one-third of the cheese and stir using a wooden spoon as the cheese starts melting.
- 3 When the cheese is well on the way to melting, add half the remaining wine and half the remaining cheese, stirring as it continues to melt. Add the remaining wine and cheese and stir again until it has almost melted.
- 4 Lift the cheese slightly from the pan, using a spoon, to give it a bit of elasticity. The cheese is ready when it is stretchy. This is now the fondue.
- 5 Do not allow the fondue to boil; it must not become too hot.
- 6 Keep the fondue warm on a fondue burner.
- 7 Cut the baguette slices in half. Attach pieces of bread to fondue forks and dip the bread in the cheese, twisting the fork until the cheese sticks to the bread.

I had never eaten a great fondue until I tasted this dish prepared by a cheese master using wonderful cheeses. It's easy to make; the secret is to melt the cheese slowly. You will need a cheese fondue set



BAKED TROUT WITH HERBS AND BACON

Truite rôtie aux herbes et lardons
From the Midi-Pyrénées Region

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1 trout, about 1kg (2lb 3oz), cleaned and scaled
- 6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 4 sprigs of thyme, finely chopped
- salt
- freshly ground pepper
- 2 bay leaves
- 3 cloves garlic
- 3 thin slices of lemon
- ½ apple, peeled, cored and cut into 3mm (⅛in) cubes
- 8 walnut halves, finely chopped
- juice of ½ lemon
- 3 rashers of bacon, cut into small strips
- 3 tablespoons finely snipped chives

Method

- 1 Preheat the oven to 140°C (280°F/Gas 1).
- 2 Pat the trout dry with a paper towel and place on a baking tray lined with baking paper.
- 3 In a bowl, mix 3 tablespoons of the olive oil with the chopped thyme and a little salt and pepper. Brush the inside and outside of the trout with this flavoured oil.
- 4 Insert the bay leaves, whole garlic cloves and lemon slices inside the fish. Place the fish in the preheated oven for about 30 minutes or until cooked, basting occasionally to keep the fish moist.
- 5 Meanwhile, mix together in a bowl the remaining oil, diced apple, chopped walnuts, lemon juice and season with salt and pepper.
- 6 Just before the trout is ready, cook the bacon for a few minutes in a small frying pan.
- 7 Carefully transfer the trout to a serving platter. Spoon a little of the apple and walnut preparation on top, sprinkle with bacon pieces and chives and serve.

The streams of the Pyrénées teem with trout that can be seen swimming in the water from the river bank. I've adapted this classic baked trout recipe by adding small apple cubes and walnuts. It's superb 

À LA MAISON



BORDEAUX CANELÉS

*Canelés de Bordeaux
From the Bordeaux/
Aquitaine Region
by Pierrick Boyer
Serves 50*

Ingredients

- 1 litre (34fl oz/4 cups) milk
- 1 vanilla pod, slit lengthways
- 60g (2oz) butter
- 620g (1lb 5oz) caster sugar
- 310g (11oz) plain (all-purpose) flour
- 1 egg, at room temperature
- 8 egg yolks, at room temperature
- 125ml (4 ½fl oz/½ cup) rum
- 200g (7oz) beeswax, melted

Method

- 1 Pour three quarters of the milk into a saucepan. Scrape the seeds of the vanilla pod into the milk and then add the vanilla pod. Heat the milk to almost boiling point. Add the butter to melt. Remove the pan from the heat and add the remaining cold milk.
- 2 Combine the caster sugar and flour in a bowl.
- 3 In another bowl, whisk the egg with the 8 egg yolks. Mix in the rum, the flour and sugar mixture and about a quarter of the warm milk, mixing until smooth. Little by little, add the remaining milk.
- 4 Refrigerate the preparation overnight. The next day, preheat the oven to 220°C (430°F/Gas 7).
- 5 Brush the canelé moulds lightly with melted beeswax. Fill the moulds with the mixture to about 5mm (¼in) below the rim.
- 6 Place the filled moulds in the preheated oven and then reduce the oven to 180°C (350°F/Gas 4). Bake for about 45–50 minutes.
- 7 Carefully turn the canelés out onto a cake rack while still hot.
- 8 Allow to cool.

In France most people buy these little cakes at the pâtisserie, but experienced dessert makers will have fun making them. You will need special metal canelé moulds, and the cake mix needs to rest overnight in the fridge before being baked



CHAMPAGNE JELLY WITH RED FRUITS

*Gelée de champagne
aux fruits rouges*
From the Champagne Region
by Pierrick Boyer
Serves 6

Ingredients

- 4 gelatine sheets (or 1x7g/1/4oz sachet powdered gelatine)
- 500ml (17fl oz/2 cups) French champagne
- juice of 1/2 lemon
- 4 tablespoons caster sugar
- 250g (81/2oz) strawberries, hulled
- 100g (31/2oz) blueberries
- 200g (7oz) raspberries (or blackberries)
- icing sugar for dusting

Method

- 1 Drop the gelatine sheets in a large bowl of cold water to soften.
- 2 Pour 3/4 cup (190ml) champagne into a saucepan and mix in the lemon juice and sugar. Bring almost to simmering point, then remove from the heat.
- 3 Drain the softened gelatine sheets, squeezing them by hand to remove excess water, then add them (or add the powdered gelatine) to the warm champagne and mix

until dissolved. Stir in the remaining champagne.

- 4 Carefully pour the preparation into attractive glasses and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or place in the freezer for about 15 minutes. Wash the strawberries, cutting large ones into halves or quarters.

- 5 Garnish the top of the set jelly with strawberries, blueberries and raspberries. Dust with icing sugar and serve to guests.

Made with French champagne, this jelly is a very special adult indulgence. It's nice at the end of a dinner party as it's light, fruity and ... because it's champagne!



Flavours of France

BABA AU RHUM

Try this perfect retro dessert and treat yourself to a glass of dessert wine



BISTRO CLASSICS

Serves 6 (allow 2 per person)

- 1 tbsp active yeast
- 3 tbsp caster sugar
- 100ml warmed milk
- 450g strong white bread flour
- a pinch of salt
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten

- 175g butter, softened

Syrup

- 200g caster sugar
- 175ml cold water
- 100ml rum, plus extra to serve

1 In a bowl, combine the yeast, 1 tbsp of the sugar, warmed milk and 4 tbsp of the flour and stir well. Leave in a warm place for 10 minutes until frothy.

2 Sift the remaining sugar, flour and salt into a food mixer with dough hook attachment. Add the yeast mixture and the eggs and beat at medium speed until the dough comes together. Beat in the butter a little at a time until sticky.

3 Turn out onto a clean surface, shape into a ball and place in an oiled bowl. Cover with cling film and leave to rise in a warm place for 1-2 hours until doubled in size.

4 Preheat the oven to 190°C/170°C fan. Lightly oil a deep, 12-hole muffin tin. Divide the dough into 12 and shape each into a ball. Press each one into the prepared tin. Cover and leave to rise for 30 minutes. Place in the oven and bake for 20 minutes until risen and golden.

5 Meanwhile, make the syrup. Place the sugar and water in a saucepan and heat gently, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in half the rum. Pour the syrup over the buns and leave to steep for 15 minutes. Serve with the extra rum and a drizzle of cream.

THIS MONTH: Baba au rhum

Louise Pickford dishes up a dessert of pure indulgence

When it comes to famous recipes, the facts about their origins are often long, complicated and much contradicted. *Baba au rhum* is no different and I have to admit, I always assumed that it originated not in France or even Europe but somewhere in the Middle East. It certainly sounds like something the Arabian Knights would have enjoyed, and not surprisingly, at one point in its long history, it was thought that its dome-like shape was inspired by Ali Baba in his tale *A Thousand and One Nights*.

It is, however, now more or less agreed by food historians that this decadent dessert was invented in France in the 18th century, by French pastry chef Nicolas Stohrer, for the exiled King of Poland, Stanislaw I. The king, living in Alsace-Lorraine, was in France for the marriage of his daughter to Louis XV and asked Nicolas to soak a rather dry *kugelhopf* cake (an Eastern European yeast cake baked in a tall dome-shaped tin) in alcohol to render it more palatable. It is known for certain that Nicolas Stohrer made and sold what we know today as a *baba au*

This recipe produces a cake with a wonderfully moist airy texture and lovely rich boozy flavour

rum when he opened his long running and world-famous pâtisserie in Paris in 1730.

Unlike the original recipe, today's *babas* are purposefully dry when cooked so that they soak up as much of the delicious rum syrup as possible. This recipe produces a cake with a wonderfully moist airy texture and lovely rich boozy flavour. *Babas* are traditionally baked in individual tins, either dome-shaped or in individual ring moulds.

Babas always bring a smile to my face. They so epitomise 1970s Britain, when French cuisine was de rigueur and bistros were hugely popular. Perhaps it's nostalgia for being in London at the time and discovering this exotic dish that creates such fond memories, but most likely it's for the way in which they were served back then, with a piped swirl of cream and that ubiquitous glacé cherry perched on top.

Fortunately, if you go to any number of bistros in France today, this timeless classic is served just the same way. They may be kitsch, but they're just delicious, so who cares?

For this recipe, you'll need either a deep 12-hole muffin tin, or 12 x 80ml capacity individual metal pudding tins. Note also that dried active yeast is available from some larger supermarkets or health food stores, and shouldn't be confused with fast-acting yeast.



Louise Pickford is a food writer and stylist with more than 25 cookbooks to her name. She lives in Charente with her food and lifestyle photographer husband Ian Wallace.

ON THE MENU NEXT MONTH... ... IT'S SAUCE BORDELAISE

Discover the origins of this delicious accompaniment, and read how to create your own version with steak



What to drink...

Richard Hemming reveals his choice of sweet wines to match this month's dessert recipe

When cooking with booze, it often makes sense to serve the same drink alongside the dish. *Boeuf bourguignon* and *coq au vin* are two classic examples. If you pour a few glasses of the same wine that went into the dish, you're pretty much guaranteed a good match.

For *baba au rhum*, it's not so straightforward. Furthermore, serving a classic pudding such as this, provides the perfect excuse to indulge in one of the wine world's most underrated treasures: dessert wine.

The main principle for matching sweet wines with recipes is to ensure that the sweetness levels are as close as possible – otherwise, one tends to overwhelm the other. Wine buffs measure sweetness in grams per litre of residual sugar (RS), meaning the amount of natural grape sugar left over after fermentation. Here's a short guide to French sweeties; anything under five

grams per litre of RS is considered dry – 'sec', in French. Then comes 'demi-sec', which can be up to 12 grams – often the sweetness is barely perceptible at this level. The next, 'moelleux', is a rarely used classification, reaching 45 grams per litre, followed by 'doux', which covers anything above that level.

However, not all dessert wines will use these terms on their labels. The most famous French sticky is Sauternes, which is by definition a sweet wine, meaning they don't use any of the above classifications. Sauternes is 'doux' by default, generally ranging between 120 and 160 grams of sugar per litre.

By happy coincidence, Lidl is selling a one-off parcel of French wines, including a Sauternes and several other stickies, all at bargain prices. Supplies are limited, but every Lidl store in the UK will be stocking them. Here are three to look out for:



Vins de Grand Sud-Ouest, Doux 2013 Jurançon

£6.79, 75cl

Jurançon hails from south-west France, where grape varieties lend themselves to sweet wines. Their secret is natural acidity to balance the wine's sweetness, leaving a refreshing, crisp finish. This simple, fruity number is a good introduction to French dessert wines.



Château Peyronnette 2014 Monbazillac

£7.99, 75cl

This region is to the north-east of Sauternes, near Bergerac. It uses the same grape varieties and production methods, so offers a very similar style at much lower prices. This bottle has delicious crystallised ginger flavours with honey, fresh mint and mixed peel.



Château Maura 2012 Sauternes

£8.99, 50cl

Sauternes is the queen of French sweet wines, made from Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle grapes in the Graves area around Bordeaux. This example is a rich golden colour and tastes a bit like spiced lime marmalade in liquid form – delicious!

Avant gardening

The lofty heights of an Italian-inspired garden afford **Sue Bradley** a view over the Dordogne Valley, while at home it's time to harvest pumpkins and clear up in the garden



The hanging gardens at the Château de Marqueyssac, known as 'les jardins suspendus', are one of the wonders of the Dordogne Valley; a rolling sea of sculpted box that exists in harmony with the verdant landscape surrounding it.

Situated some 130 metres above the river, and commanding panoramic views of the castles and villages of the Périgord, the 22-hectare park belongs to a château built during the 17th century by Bertrand Vernet, who commissioned a pupil of the celebrated landscape designer André Le Nôtre to create a fitting setting for his home.

The subsequent addition of more than 150,000 pruned box (*Buxus sempervirens*),

along with stone pines (*Pinus pinea*), cypresses and Naples cyclamen (*Cyclamen hederifolium*) to the terraces surrounding the castle, was the work of Julien de Cerval, who took on the château in 1866 and whose choice of plants was driven by his love of Italy. He also built gazebos and laid five kilometres of walks around the château.

After de Cerval's death, the Bishop of Mantua - later Pope Pius X - visited, and his favoured spot under an archway of greenery is now known as The Pope's Seat.

In 1996, the challenge of maintaining de Cerval's creation was taken up by Kléber Rossillon, grandson of Marius Rossillon, otherwise known as O'Galop, the artist best known for creating the Michelin Man.

He oversaw the restoration and

improvement of the park, including the clearing of pathways and terraces and reshaping of tens of thousands of box trees, the maintenance of which is carried out by a team of five gardeners.

Sculptures by Gérard Chabert and Alain de Cerval, a descendant of Julien, add a further dimension to the gardens, as do a waterfall that flows from nine cisterns carved into rock, and the presence of free-roaming peacocks and an aviary of exotic birds.

The gardens at Marqueyssac attract in excess of 200,000 visitors a year, some of whom choose to scale its *via ferrata* - a 200 metre-high rock face circuit - while others prefer the gentle ambience of candlelit evenings every Thursday in July and August.

www.marqueyssac.com

THINGS TO DO IN THE GARDEN THIS MONTH

1 Tidy borders but leave seed heads in place to provide winter nourishment for birds. Those stems that are cut

back can be added to the compost heap to create organic matter, in order to use it for enriching the garden the following year.

2 Protect tender plants from frost by moving them to a sheltered spot, covering with fleece or bringing under cover.

3 Plant shrubs and trees now - look out for bare root plants which are available now and cheaper to buy than potted plants.

4 Rake up fallen leaves and use to make leaf mould. Some varieties take longer to break down, so start early if you can.

In season

PUMPKIN

The pumpkin is inextricably linked to October, though there is far more to this squash than a mere canvas for a Halloween jack-o'-lantern. Its nutrient-rich flesh is a delicious ingredient for pies, soups and raviolis, while its seeds can be eaten as a tasty snack.

Of the hundreds of pumpkin cultivars available to growers, chefs tend to favour the sweet and meaty 'Musquée de Provence', which has dark brown skin and very pronounced curves, while those who opt for 'Sweet Dumpling' appreciate its white and green colouring and distinctive parsnip-like taste.

Other varieties worth trying are 'Hooligan', with its orange stripes and the red-skinned 'Rouge Vif d'Etampes'.

Pumpkins are heavy feeders and grow best in soils that have been improved with manures and compost to provide plenty of nutrients. They also benefit from regular feeds of high potash fertilisers. Sow seeds in the ground in a sunny spot after the danger of frosts has passed, or start them in pots under cover a few weeks earlier. Make sure to water pumpkins regularly during the growing season, in order to ensure that liquid is aimed at their roots rather than the neck of the plant to avoid rotting.

Harvest fruits before the first frosts and store in a cool, dry place.



My French garden

Sue and Neil Spoonley bought their house in Beyssenac in Corrèze in 2000, but only moved there permanently six years later. Since moving they have spent much time on the garden and won the departmental accolade of 'Best Garden Visible from the Road in Corrèze' in 2011 and 2013

OVER
TO YOU

What was your garden like when you first arrived?

There was land of 7,000m², but you could not call it a garden when we bought it. However, it was segmented into different areas by fences, walls and a lane, which had not been touched for over five years.

How have you developed it?

Gradually over the years we have tamed our garden, and created a variety of 'rooms' with different characteristics. The rough field is now a park with very large beds of bushes, flowers and fruit trees. What had been a vegetable garden many years ago was stripped out and has



What grows well in your area of France?

Weeds! Almost everything grows well here. However, each year is very different, and some years something grows well, and the next year it is a complete disaster.

become a mix of flowers, fruiting bushes, and vegetable beds. Elsewhere we have added fruit trees and built a range of flower beds, but planted with perennials. We immediately planted small fruit bushes so by the time we moved here permanently six

years later we had well-established bushes delivering all the fruit we wanted.

What tips would you give to someone with a garden in your area?

Generally speaking, you should look to get a good balance between shrubs and plants. Without shrubs, this year would have been a disaster as the heat has damaged almost all the annuals and perennials. And then aim at keeping the garden maintenance down.

What do you enjoy most about the garden?

We love to walk around and see the things that have grown from all our efforts of sowing, planting, pruning, weeding, mowing etc. It is not only flowers but all the vegetables and the fruit as well. Without a garden to fill the lovely summer days, what would you spend your time on?



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LES PRATIQUES

You've dreamed the dream, now get the expert advice; financial, legal and property solutions from some of the best in the business



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The latest stories from the French property scene, including perfect buying conditions in Paris, plus currency news

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If you spend time in both France and the UK, you'll need to understand tax residency. Rob Kay looks at the options

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With increased interest in Paris from both French and overseas property buyers, we select three apartments in the capital

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Being aware of exchange rate fluctuations can save you lots of money, as our expert David Trumper reveals

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Your questions answered by our professionals. This month: making a will, holiday homes and running a gîte or B&B

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In this month's *Living France* guide, Kate McNally explains why the pharmacy is the first port of call for many ailments

Property news

Whether you're planning your move to France, or are already living there, we bring you the latest from the world of French property



Capital return

The French capital is once again on the radar of property buyers, both French and overseas, who have been holding out for the perfect buying conditions, according to the latest Paris Residential Property Market report by Athena Advisors.

Figures reveal a slight increase in prices in Paris of 0.8% over the three months to July 2015 and a year-on-year price recovery of 0.1% with the average price per square metre rising to €8,368. Transactions have also risen recently and summer viewings in Paris are up 42% compared to last year.

"Those buying in the last six months have timed their purchases almost to perfection," says Nicholas Leach of Athena Advisors. This year has seen low interest rates, favourable exchange rates and softening property prices

all of which have attracted foreign investors. Along with this there have been several political developments that have benefitted overseas buyers: in February capital gains tax for non-EU residents was reduced to 19% and in March social charges on rental income and property sales for non-residents were ruled illegal by the European Court of Justice.

As a result the proportion of foreign buyers of Parisian property has risen from 8.2% in 2014 to 9.2% in the first three months of 2015, although this is still considerably less than London where foreign buyers comprise 75% of the market. A study by the Notaires de Paris association has revealed that there has been a decline of international buyers buying a second home (only 3% of buyers in 2014 compared to 4% in previous years) with more

NEWS IN BRIEF

Those searching for accommodation in Paris could soon have the option of staying at the majestic Palace of Versailles as the governing body that manages the palace is inviting bids from companies to create and run a hotel in three of the mansions. The Grand Contrôle, Petit Contrôle and Pavilion are on offer and it would require huge investment to get the buildings up to scratch. Not all of the rooms would lead into the grounds but those that do will also have views across the famous Versailles gardens (pictured).



The French government has extended the cooling-off period (*délai de retraction*) for buyers of French property from seven days to 10 days with immediate effect. This means buyers in France now have 10 days from when they receive the countersigned copy of the *compromis de vente* to withdraw from the purchase. Sellers do not have a cooling-off period and if you pull out after the 10 days then you will probably forfeit the deposit.

opting to buy a primary residence in Paris.

The report reveals that foreign buyers tend to focus on the most central locations in Paris causing a spike in prices in certain *arrondissements*, including the 11th *arrondissement*, on the right bank of the Seine and home to the Place de la Bastille, which recorded an increase of 6.3% in the second quarter of 2015.

Unlike London, there is a marked difference between prices in central Paris and the area beyond the *Périphérique* (roughly equivalent to Greater London) with prices in Île-de-France rising 187% over the last 20 years compared to a massive increase of 365% in central Paris.

www.athenaadvisors.co.uk
www.paris.notaires.fr

Rent due

A controversial cap on rent prices in Paris came into force on 1 August and has been met with concern and criticism from estate agents and landlords. Under the new loi ALUR landlords will have to set the rent in accordance with the average price per square metre in that area, up to a maximum of 20% more or 30% less than this average figure. The aim of the cap is to make Paris more affordable for low and medium income renters and it is expected to lower one in five new leases in the city which has seen a rise in rents of 42% in the past decade. However, estate agents and landlords warn it could discourage property investors from buying property to let in Paris, destabilise the market and actually lead to a drop in the number of rental properties available. If the cap is successful then it is expected to be extended to other cities with high rents, including Nice, Bordeaux and Grenoble.

PICK
OF THE
MONTH



FRANCE PROPERTY SHOP

Sarah MacGilchrist, of Belle France Immobilier, has chosen this 18th-century stone house in a village in the north of Mayenne in Pays de la Loire as her property pick this month. Recently renovated by the present owners, the property has plenty of intriguing features including wooden panelling and floors, period fireplaces, exposed beams and a former chapel. On the market for €199,000, the house offers two living rooms, a breakfast room in the former chapel, a fitted kitchen, dining room and four bedrooms. There are two attics with fireplaces that could be converted into further accommodation and a walled garden.

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CURRENCY NEWS

Investors pick euro as their 'safe haven'



Lee Chappell, Corporate FX Dealer at Currencies Direct, throws the spotlight on this month's global financial trends

The dust has settled in Greece for now, giving the European Central Bank (ECB) and its boss, Mario Draghi, time to think about how to resolve the downward pressure on eurozone inflation.

Investors who want a 'safe haven' currency are busily moving to the euro in response to the expected interest rate rise in the US (due this month) and global fears over China's economic meltdown, which have made the US dollar look less attractive than usual.

This euro buy-up has caused inflation to stall, which should mean that it is about to decline slightly. The ECB has once again been forced to ponder whether it ought to extend its quantitative easing (i.e. bond purchasing) programme, which is scheduled to end in September 2016.

In Mr Draghi's latest speech, he suggested that the programme could be extended if the eurozone's economy as a whole isn't showing enough growth. The ECB wants inflation to hover close to 2%, but inflation is expected to decline into negative territory in the lead up to 2016.

On 3 September, the ECB decided to keep rates on hold for at least another month, which was no surprise to the markets. With so much uncertainty still surrounding a number of issues in the EU, investors would be astonished if the rates were moved before the turn of the year.

With the euro looking a bit sickly against its major counterparts in recent months, the export industry is thriving as foreign businesses pour money into local trades by buying goods at a 'cheaper' rate of exchange.

If you're looking to move money in or out of the eurozone, it's a good idea to talk to a currency specialist before acting at a moment that could cost you a lot of money. One of our friendly experts will be happy to help you navigate the ever-changing foreign exchange markets.

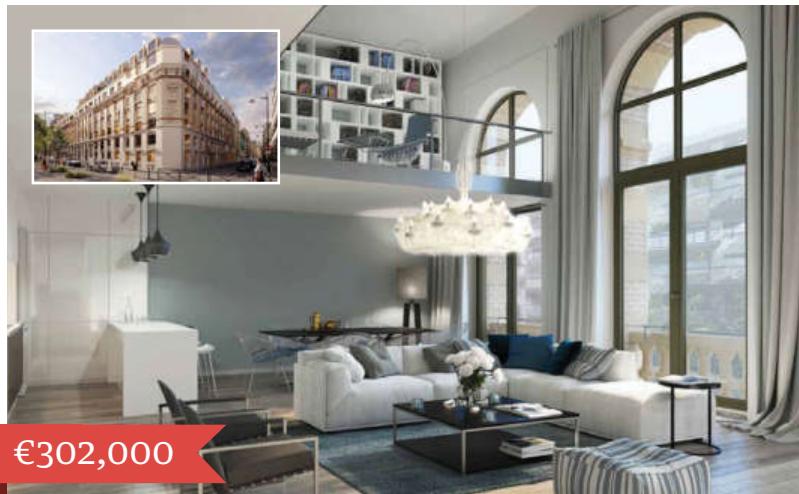
www.currenciesdirect.com

GBP to EUR



Three of a kind

With increased interest in Paris from both French and overseas property buyers (see page 65), **Emma Rawle** picks three apartments in the capital



€302,000

16th arrondissement, Paris

1 This new-build development in Paris's 16th *arrondissement* offers the best of both worlds - brand new, state-of-the-art apartments in a period building that is being painstakingly restored. The beautiful baroque building will house 25 apartments ranging from studios to four-bedroom flats all with bright open spaces and bespoke designs. Rue Saint-Didier is surrounded by shops, cafes and restaurants, the Trocadéro is just a short walk away and there are three métro stations within 500m of the building making it easy to get around. Prices range from €302,000 to €2.43 million and the apartments are due to be finished by the end of 2018.
www.athenaadvisors.co.uk

2nd arrondissement, Paris

2 On the fourth floor of a building in the 2nd *arrondissement*, this apartment has been used as an atelier for an artist and so is full of character, including the original parquet flooring. Completely refurbished with soundproofed walls and ceilings, the apartment offers one bedroom, one bathroom and an open-plan living room and kitchen area with total space of 54.5m². The road is one of the best-known market streets in Paris with bakeries, butchers, cafes and restaurants and is a minute's walk from the métro and less than five minutes from the Gare du Nord and Gare de l'Est.

www.home-hunts.com



3rd arrondissement, Paris

3 In the centre of Paris, this apartment is within walking distance of Le Marais, the Louvre the Notre-Dame and the Centre Pompidou. On the fifth floor of a building with an elevator, the apartment is spacious and full of character with wooden beams and a stone floor. There are two/three bedrooms, a large living room with an American-style kitchen, a bathroom and a large cellar to store your wine. Located in a quiet residential area of the third *arrondissement*, the apartment is close to several markets and historic squares.
www.leggettfrance.com

Ask the experts

Whether you're planning your move to France, or are already living there, our panel of professionals aims to keep you fully informed with the best advice for every eventuality

A WILL AND A WAY

Q I'm making a new will and am electing for it to be administered under UK law. I don't want to make a separate French will in case it invalidates the UK one, but I see the law states you must have the handing over of your French property dealt with by a notaire. Will they insist on doing a French will, and what are the likely charges?

SAMANTHA SMITH

A It is certainly sensible to take extra care when writing wills in order to make sure to cover assets in different jurisdictions. There may, however, be a very good argument for having separate wills to cover the different estates.

A notaire in France would not necessarily insist on writing a separate will for the French property, although if that is what is proposed, it must be drafted with utmost care, to ensure that there is no risk of cross-over or unintended revocation, as is clearly (and rightly so) a major concern here.

A notaire could, in practice, suggest that a French will could not revoke a pre-existing English will, although English law would not be that lenient.

While it is possible to put the terms of an English will into effect in France, and indeed only have one will to apply to all of one's assets, this can give rise to its own complications.

With the new EU Regulation on inheritance matters having come into force on 17 August 2015, the application of English law might well be a suitable option.

Yet until they are then tested through the

courts (which may take years in the event of a case going all the way to the European Court of Justice), an element of doubt remains as to how this will work in practice.

There are, however, other options that may also be suitable, and it would be wise, therefore, to assess all of these in detail with specialist solicitors with a knowledge of both French and English law, to ensure that a detailed analysis of a person's situation can be carried out before taking any steps, whether in the UK or France.

MATTHEW CAMERON

HOLIDAY HOME

Q My wife and I have young twin boys, and are looking for a holiday home in France that will require very little maintenance, preferably in an area with lots of things to do for both us and the children. We also want to rent it out when we are not there. How easy is this to do, what rental income can we realistically expect and what areas should we consider?

JOHN ROBERTS

A This is quite a common set of property requirements for international buyers. For those who don't live near their holiday home, a low-maintenance property can prove ideal, as trying to manage repairs and dealing with any other issues that may occur - in addition to the rudimentary basics of renting out the property - can prove extremely time-consuming and expensive to do from abroad, especially as many people often don't speak French well enough to handle it themselves.



So, where to start looking, and what properties to consider? An old stone cottage in a quaint village, although alluringly charming, is often not the most appropriate property purchase unless you plan on travelling to France a couple of times a month and have a lot of time on your hands.

If you don't fall into this category, then consider the option of going for a new-build property (which you will often have to buy off-plan) with a management company on-site, who will be able to deal not only with the maintenance, repairs and security but also the rental of your property.

There are a good number of these places available in France - most often they are found in busy seaside resorts, in large cities or in the Alps, and so draw a great number of tourists, which in turn means that you are

The experts



MATTHEW CAMERON
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is MD and founder of Leapfrog Properties, specialising in sales of French properties to international buyers.
www.leapfrog-properties.com



GLYNIS SHAW is joint MD of French Connections holiday rentals and property sales online.
www.frenchconnections.co.uk



For those who don't live near their holiday home, a low-maintenance property can prove ideal

most likely to get the best rental income. They often have additional facilities such as swimming pools, a reception and sports facilities, which help boost the attractiveness to potential holidaymakers looking to rent property in the area.

These types of properties are often leasebacks (limited personal use but with a fixed rental payment). However, you can find places that are free of any requirement to rent your property out for large chunks of the year. In terms of rental income, you can typically expect anything between 3% and 5% net if you allow it to be rented for most of the high season.

NICK DOWLATSHAH

GîTES VS B&B

Q After many years of dreaming about making the move to France, I've finally made a decision! I've put in an offer on a large property, but need advice on whether to run it as gîtes or as a B&B. What are the main differences in lifestyle?

LOUIS ROGERS

A Firstly, on a personal level, you will need to be friendly, tolerant, empathetic and dedicated to good service for both lifestyle options.

If you run gîtes, then regular practical chores include servicing and maintaining the properties, responding to emergencies and working intensively on change-over days to get the accommodation ready. Generally this happens once a week.

Regular hosting chores include welcoming guests on arrival, showing them their accommodation, explaining how everything works, and being on call to deal with queries and emergencies.

If you have several gîtes, you might bring people together for games or offer a weekly evening meal or barbecue. Guests can ask questions about the property and the area all in one go. You can also decide on a balance between privacy and availability, so you could have either an 'open door' policy for guests to come and ask for what they need at any time, or specified hours when you are 'in' and available to them.

Time out is good because if you get busy and stressed, you can meet friends and 'offload'. It's never appropriate to burden guests with your problems or involve them in local politics!

A B&B is more 'hands on' than gîtes, as you have strangers in your house. Depending on your location, your season may be longer.

Practical duties include cooking and serving a good breakfast, clearing away, cleaning and making up rooms daily. The average stay may be shorter than at a gîte, so there tends to be extra cleaning and checking in and out.

If you decide to offer the true *table d'hôte* experience, with a home-cooked evening meal, this demands more preparation and hospitality, so it's essential to be swan-like - serene on the surface while paddling like mad underwater.

Again, there are choices and variables. You can take time out in the middle of the day, have your own quarters separate from guest rooms, decide how much distance you want to maintain and judge how much privacy your visitors prefer.

GLYNIS SHAW

This article is for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal or other professional advice. We would advise you to seek professional advice before acting on it.

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION TO PUT TO OUR PANEL OF EXPERTS?
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Home truths



Do you know what taxes to pay, and where?

Rob Kay unravels the knotty issue of residential status

Where are you resident for tax purposes? The answer may not be as simple as you think.

If you live in the UK and just visit a holiday home in France a few weeks a year, you are most likely to be resident in the UK for tax purposes. If you, your spouse and any dependent children live in France full-time and only visit the UK for brief holidays, you are most likely French resident.

But for those who fall in between, and spend time in and/or have property in both countries, it can be complicated. Many people do get caught out.

It is important to establish your tax residence, to ensure you pay tax in the right country. If you mistakenly assess your residence or pay tax in the wrong place you could end up paying more tax than you should. Correcting past mistakes may prove costly and stressful when the tax authorities catch up with you, and you could find yourself subject to a tax investigation.

You also cannot put effective tax planning in place until you are sure of what taxes you should be paying in which country, so seek professional advice early on. If you have not yet moved to France, take advice before you do, since that can result in you paying less tax than if you leave it until you are resident in France.

FRENCH TAX RESIDENCY RULES

If you are tax resident in France, then you are liable to pay French tax on your worldwide income, gains and wealth, and are subject to the French succession (inheritance) tax rules. It is your responsibility to make yourself known to the French tax authorities and to fully declare your income and assets accordingly.

Note in particular that an individual does not have a choice; you either are, or are not, French tax resident under the rules.

An individual is deemed to be a tax resident of France if at least one of the four following tests is fulfilled:

- France is your main residence or home (your *foyer*). This embraces ideas of

permanence and stability, and is the rule the French authorities most rely on. The *foyer* is the place where your close family (spouse and minor children) habitually live. Even if you spend most of your time abroad, if your *foyer* is in France you will be considered French tax resident.

- France is your principal place of abode, your *lieu de séjour principal*. This usually means you spend more than 183 days in France per calendar year. However, if you spend less than 183 days in France, but more days than in any other country, you may still be deemed to have your *lieu de séjour principal* in France. This test is only applied if a *foyer* cannot be determined.

- Your principal activity is in France. For example, your occupation is in France (whether salaried or not) or your main income arises in France, unless you can show it is incidental.

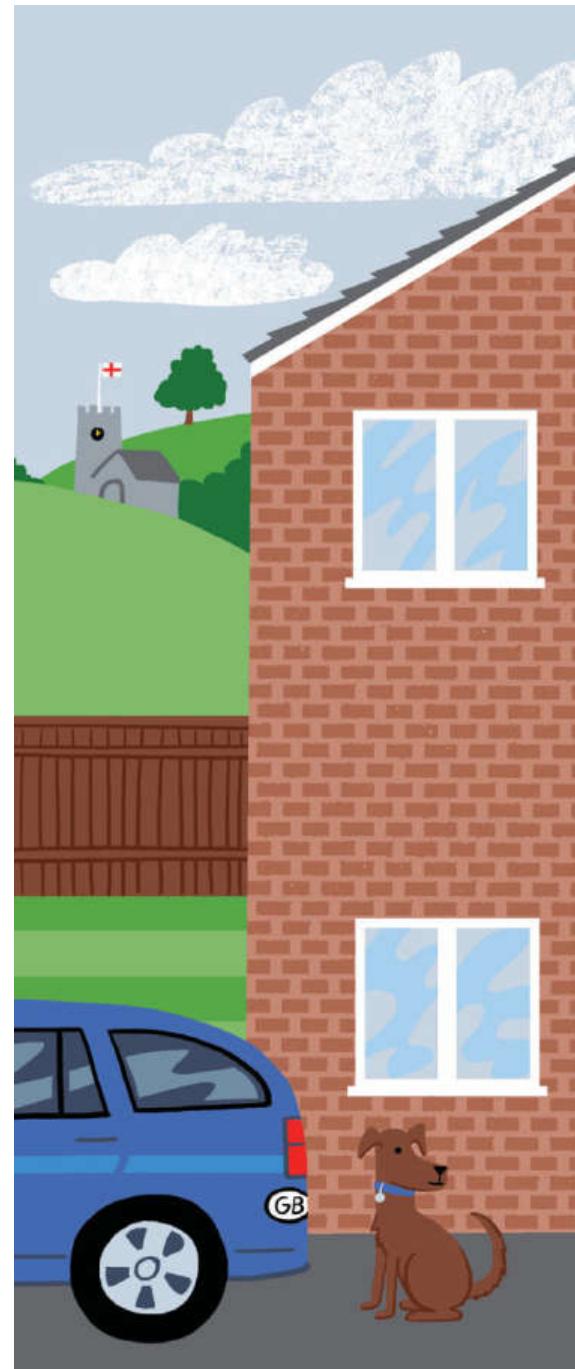
- France is the country of your most substantial assets (centre of economic interests). This means if France is the place of principal investments, or where assets are administered, or where your business affairs are based, or where a larger part of your income is drawn from.

If the French tax authorities question your tax residence, and claim you are resident there when you believe you are not, then it is up to them to prove their case and bring factual evidence to support it.

You are tax resident from the day after you arrive in France, if you arrived with an intention to reside there indefinitely.

France takes a 'split-year' approach for tax in relation to residence and non-residence. In your tax year of arrival, only the worldwide income received after the date of arrival is liable to French income tax (excepting French-sourced income, which is always taxable). In the year of departure, the reverse of this is true.

There is obviously an opportunity to save considerable amounts of French tax by disposing of assets before you arrive in France, but ensure that you take specialist advice to make sure you get it right.



UK TAX RESIDENCY RULES

In the UK, the Statutory Residence Test determines whether you are liable for UK income tax and capital gains tax on your worldwide income.

To assess your residence status, you need to work through three tests in order. The time period referred to is always a UK tax year: from 6 April to 5 April.

Under the automatic overseas test, you are treated as not resident if you meet any of the following conditions:

- You spend less than 46 days in the UK and were not resident the previous three years.



You can be resident in both the UK and France simultaneously. In this case, the double tax treaty will determine where you are resident for tax purposes

DOUBLE TAX TREATY

You can be resident in both the UK and France simultaneously. In this case, 'tie breaker' rules in the UK/France double tax treaty will determine where you are resident for tax purposes.

These consider where you have a permanent home available to you, where your centre of vital interest is located, and where you have an habitual abode. If these are indeterminate, it comes down to nationality. If the issue is still not solved after the nationality test, the authorities of both countries will try to find an agreement.

Many people avoid becoming resident in France because they believe they would pay too much tax as a result. However, if you are retired and take specialist, personalised advice, you may find that you can use compliant tax-efficient arrangements in France to considerably lower your tax liabilities. You may even find that you could pay less tax in France than you do in the UK. **LF**

www.blevinsfranks.com

- You spend less than 16 days in the UK and were resident in any of the three previous UK tax years.

- You work overseas full-time, subject to certain conditions.

Under the automatic residence test you are treated as resident if you meet any of the following conditions:

- You spend 183 days or more in the UK.
- Your only or main home is in the UK. The home must be available for use for at least 91 days and actually used at least 30 separate days.
- You work full-time in the UK for 365 days,

subject to certain conditions.

Where your residence status is not determined under the first two tests, the 'sufficient ties' test determines whether you are resident in the UK based on a combination of the number of days and 'ties' you have to the UK. The 'ties' are: family; available accommodation; substantive work; more than 90 days in the previous two years, and more time in the UK than any other country. There are specific definitions for each tie.

Be aware that this is a very brief summary of complex legislation, so you need to take professional advice.

Tax rates, scope and reliefs may change. Any statements concerning taxation are based upon our understanding of current taxation laws and practices which are subject to change. Tax information has been summarised; an individual is advised to seek personalised advice.

Currency matters



By being aware of how currency fluctuations can affect you, and by being prepared, your money could go a whole lot further, writes *David Trumpeter*

There are many things you can organise in advance when making the move to France, but no amount of planning or research can change how the French property market is performing or what the exchange rate will be when it's time to pay for your new home.

France, and its economy, have long been used as something of a barometer for the entire Eurozone. If France is doing well then you could reasonably expect the rest of the Eurozone to be ticking along nicely. However, this has not been the case for a while now.

In summer 2015, we've finally seen some growth returning to the French economy after the best part of a two-year stagnation. Recently, driven by wider deflation caused by falling oil prices, consumer spending has started to return – albeit rather slowly. And with unemployment still north of 10% at the end of 2014, it's not difficult to see why.

Unlike most European countries, however, France is yet to really benefit from the weaker euro currency. Germany, Spain and Italy have all seen increases in demand for their exports at far greater rates than France. Germany's are up 12.4% since the beginning of the year, while Spain's were up 6% alone in March. France, however, has only managed a 2.5% gain since January.

So what's the cause of all this? Well, France's manufacturing sector has contracted every month for the past 12 months, while others in the Eurozone have been growing. Government austerity has limited investment in key industries and money coming in from abroad has been directed towards other Eurozone nations to save on taxes and costs.

And here's the bit you're interested in: what does this mean for the French housing market and for expats buying property in France? Actually, it's rather good news, since in the same way as France's manufacturing sector has contracted, a similar lack of investment has been seen in the French housing market. In the past 15 years, French house prices have

increased by around 6% a year, but in 2014 prices fell by 2.4%, and with cheaper mortgage rates, it's a buyers' market at the moment.

With prices coming down, your money should go further. But that's before you've accounted for the exchange rate. You may be surprised at just how much you could save – or lose – through the exchange rates, and this is why it's important to get your finances in order from the start.

EXCHANGE RATES

One way to be prepared is by looking at the exchange rate and making sure that you won't end up paying more than you've budgeted for. For example, if you're buying a property in France worth €500,000, a 2% shift in the currency rate is worth £10,000 – that's the sort of fluctuation that could buy you a new kitchen, or have the garden landscaped.

The pound has enjoyed real strength against the euro in 2015, and in August this year, it was 13% stronger against the single currency than a year before. In August 2014, one pound bought you €1.25. A year later, it would have bought you €1.41. If you were buying a €1m property in France, it would have cost you £800,000 in August 2014, and just over £709,000 a year later – that's a staggering £91,000 less.

When it comes to actually making the transfer, and to make sure you're not stung by uncompetitive exchange rates, it's a good idea to speak to a currency specialist who will take the time to understand your requirements and offer options that would best suit your needs. A good currency specialist will always be on hand to guide you through the process.

You can't control the exchange rates, but there is a way of guaranteeing yourself some control and some certainty over the rate you'll end up getting, and that's by making sure you use a forward contract.

Let's say you're buying a property in France. You don't need to pay the balance for another two months, but you really like the look of the



current pound to euro exchange rate. That's absolutely fine. With a forward contract, you can secure that exchange rate now, which means you'll know exactly how much you'll be paying for the property when you settle the balance in two months' time; no matter what the currency market does in the meantime.

Once you've signed on the dotted line and made the leap, the story doesn't end there. You will still need to make regular payments and there are ways to ensure that you make them in a fast, efficient and cost-effective way.

If you haven't bought the property outright, you may need to pay mortgage payments every month. That's where a currency



You may be surprised at just how much you could save - or lose - through the exchange rates, and this is why it's important to get your finances in order before you start

those opted into through work.

And, of course, when transferring your pension from the UK, make sure you use a currency exchange company to secure a competitive rate.

SENDING MONEY HOME

If you still need to send money home – perhaps you're working abroad, but your family is still living at home, or maybe you're paying a mortgage on a second home – you can use a currency exchange company to make those payments for you. In the same way as regular transfers work, you can arrange for your salary to be sent automatically every month, either at the exchange rate on the day, or at a rate you've fixed in advance.

BUYING A FRENCH PROPERTY IS JUST THE START

There will always be reasons to make currency transfers, so it makes sense to save as much money as you can. Though no one knows where the exchange rates will go, you can have some control by fixing your rate and by choosing a currency exchange company rather than a bank, with whom you could end up paying much more – sometimes 2, 3 or even 4% – through inferior exchange rates. Speak to a currency expert and you may be surprised by how much you could save. **LF**
www.timescurrencyservices.co.uk

David Trumpeter is a currency expert at Times Currency Services

exchange company comes in. You can choose for the payment to be made from your UK bank account every month at the exchange rate on the day, or choose to fix an exchange rate in advance so you'll know how much you'll be paying every month. This will help you budget, and you'll have the peace of mind of knowing that whatever the exchange rates do, you won't be affected.

What's also beneficial about regular payments is that they are paid automatically without you having to do a thing, which means that they give you more time for the more important things, such as enjoying your new surroundings.

PENSION PAYMENTS

You can claim your UK pension and transfer it to France. Through what are known as Qualifying Recognised Overseas Pensions Schemes (QROPS) – overseas pensions which meet the rules of where they are located – you can have your pension paid into your new French bank account.

Once you have become a tax resident in France, you can transfer your pension fund from the UK into your QROPS just as you would between pension providers back home. You needn't worry about transferring your work pension scheme as you can transfer most types of pension, including personal pensions and

The Living France GUIDE TO...

THE ROLE OF THE PHARMACY

For medicines and pills, lotions and potions, not to mention expert medical advice, look no further than the pharmacies of France, as **Kate McNally** explains

Little havens of beatitude lie in wait behind the flashing green neon cross on the streets of France. Shelves are lined with more potions and lotions than you ever knew existed, in delicate, mostly white packaging, making you feel healthier just by looking at them. Kindly pharmacists and their assistants (also in white) wait to listen and advise in a balmy calm that immediately soothes all your senses.

Welcome to the world of the French pharmacy – a boutique-style chemist as far removed from the likes of Boots and Superdrug as foie gras is from Spam. But these oases in the desert of ill-health are under threat. The French government has outlined proposals allowing the sale of non-prescription medicines, such as paracetamol and cough mixture, in supermarkets. While this is accepted practice in the UK, French pharmacies play a key role at the tail-end of the sophisticated French health care system which, claim the pharmacists, would be undermined by opening up the sector.

To understand this better, let's take a closer look at their role.

QUALIFIED PROFESSIONALS

There are more than 23,000 pharmacies across France, even most rural villages have one. The network is made up of small independent pharmacies owned by qualified pharmacists who will have studied six to seven years to obtain their degree. They take the same



foundation training as trainee doctors and other health care clinicians, and in the final year must write a thesis on a specialist subject.

French pharmacists believe their role is as much to advise and educate their customers as it is to supply medicines. They generally have regular contact with their customers, especially in smaller towns and villages, and in many cases are the first port of call for advice on ailments, before doctors, such is the level of trust and respect they command. An important part of their training is centred on what is called *'l'éducation thérapeutique du patient'* (patient therapeutic education), which is all about educating people in terms of raising awareness of health issues and diseases, ensuring appropriate use of medicines, and recognising symptoms and side effects.

CESPHARM (the Comité d'Education

Sanitaire et Sociale de la Pharmacie Française) supports them in this mission, disseminating information and organising campaigns (for example, this summer, how to stay well during a heat wave).

INSIDE THE PHARMACY BEHIND THE COUNTER...

French pharmacies, like a French person's medical cabinet, are well stocked. Whatever the ache, pain or rash – ears, throat, feet, eyes, stomach – you name it, the pharmacist will whisk a strange-named remedy out of the seemingly endless behind-the-counter drawers. And there's the rub. You will have to ask for the medicine, as French pharmacists,

being the professionals they are, like to interact with the customer and quite possibly ask a few questions to make sure they are giving you the very precise treatment needed for your specific problem. Which means you will need to know a minimum of French or learn some of the basic brand names – for example Doliprane is paracetamol, Advil is ibuprofen, Biseptine is antiseptic cream – and you will have to ask out loud for certain products that in the UK you prefer to grab swiftly and discreetly from the shelf for yourself!

This approach also means that on occasion you need to be a patient with patience. It is not uncommon for a fairly lengthy consultation to take place, though there is often an assistant to take care of the more straightforward purchases who will come to the rescue.



IN FRONT OF THE COUNTER...

While medicines account for around 80% to 90% of sales, French pharmacies also sell a wide range of natural health and beauty products, usually enticingly displayed in the open free-serve space. These products will always have a beneficial health element, such as organic, natural or therapeutic ingredients, or protective properties. So while you will find lip balm and lavender oils, you won't find mainstream cosmetics or false nails. Equally, the pharmacist will know the products on sale and have verified their natural composition or therapeutic benefit.

Most pharmacies also stock a range of animal health care products, including flea collars, vitamins and tic treatments, which are usually slightly cheaper than they would be at a veterinary surgery.

French pharmacists believe their role is as much to advise and educate their customers as it is to supply medicines

WHAT YOU PAY FOR

Although the pharmacist is usually capable of advising which medicine you need, he or she may well suggest you go to the doctor in order to obtain a prescription. Most medicines are entirely or partially free with a prescription.

This payment method works through what is called the *carte vitale* system – essentially a national health card carrying your personal details, which is the gateway to the French health care system. It is arguably the first administrative piece of paper (or plastic) you should apply for on moving to France (apply at

the local CPAM – Caisse Primaire d'Assurance Maladie – where you can find out what to do).

In the pharmacy, simply hand over the prescription and your *carte vitale*, and quite likely you won't have to pay a penny. You may also be asked on the first visit to a pharmacy for details of your *mutuelle* – this is the top-up private insurance that most French people, and those living in France, take out to cover some, or all, of the remaining percentage to be paid for medicines and health care, or to pay for treatments that aren't included in subsidised French health care. Details of your *mutuelle* 



are entered into the system and you won't normally be asked for them again on subsequent visits. You will pay up front any costs not covered by the state, and are reimbursed a few days later directly into your bank account by your *mutuelle*.

PRICING AND MARGINS

Medicines are strongly subsidised by the French welfare state, which some believe leads to an over-readiness on both the part of patients to ask for them, and doctors to prescribe them. Pharmacists see their role at the end of the line as one of controlling supply and keeping a check on patients' use of medicines – as mentioned above, their relationship role often means they are better placed to spot developing patterns or problematic side effects.

The French state sets the price of prescription medicines, and at the start of 2015 raised the payment made to pharmacists per box of medicine from €0.53 to €0.80, rising to €1 from 2016. In return, pharmacies have agreed to aim to increase the sale of generic products, as opposed to branded products, to 85%, and to lower the margins they take on specific medicines sold (these follow a sliding scale downwards according to the price of the

THE S1 FORM

Before leaving the UK, apply for the S1 form from the Department for Work and Pensions. This will cover your health costs in France on a temporary basis until you enter the French employment system, at which point you will enter the French welfare system.

The S1 form (formerly E106/E121) is a certificate of entitlement to health care in another EEA country, provided via the social security authority in your home country.

Before leaving the UK, apply for the S1 form which covers your health costs in France on a temporary basis

product). They have also undertaken to add instructions relevant to individual patients on how to administer the medicines or drugs, should patients have concerns.

With the French government aiming to reduce the health care budget, which will inevitably have a knock-on squeeze on medical supplies, the FSPF (Fédération des Syndicats Pharmaceutiques de France) were

happy to reduce margins – which are greater for more expensive medicines likely to be more widely hit by cuts – for the guarantee of a higher set payment on all medical products.

When it comes to pricing non-medical products, pharmacies are free to set their own margins and therefore have more control over potential revenues from this sales platform. A careful selection of the right cosmetic and health products to suit a pharmacy's primary customer profile can significantly boost profits. It no doubt helps to explain why these products are displayed in a manner that makes the sight and smell of them so difficult to resist! **LF**

NEXT MONTH...
GUIDE TO PETS
Find out why the French are a nation of pet lovers

LANGUAGE

This month: learn the vocabulary you'll need when visiting a pharmacy and have some fun with our favourite puzzles



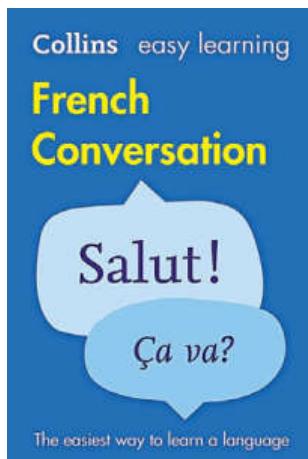
Get the vocab: **poule**

Meaning 'hen', 'poule' can also be used as a term of endearment: 'ma poule' means 'my chick'. 'La chair de poule' is the French equivalent of goosebumps, while if someone asks how you are, replying with 'Ça roule, ma poule!', it is a bit like saying 'Ça va super bien', but in a familiar, cheeky tone.

TALK THIS WAY

The new *Easy Learning French Conversation* language book from Collins is aimed at learners who want to brush up their spoken French skills. With a clean, clear layout, the book is divided into 12 units with key phrases and vocabulary for specific situations, including small talk, travel, eating out, shopping and health. There are also lifestyle tips giving cultural information, alongside a useful 'One Stop Phrase Shop' containing important expressions and turns of phrase to help you sound more natural in French. Free audio downloads are available from www.collins.co.uk/easylearningresources

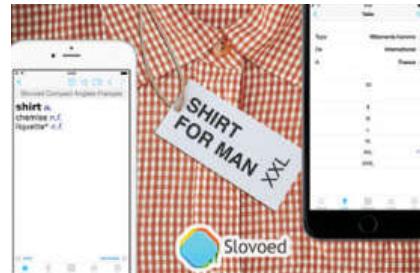
Collins Easy Learning French Conversation, £7.99
www.collins.co.uk



Easy look up

The free French-English talking dictionary app from Slovoed allows users to look up words and idioms quickly and easily, with entries voiced by native speakers to assist pronunciation. A free converter is included for currency, size, length, temperature, speed, weight and volume. The app is free and available from the App Store in the Reference category. Full dictionary versions are available as in-app purchases, and start from \$9.99 (or equivalent amount in other currencies). An internet connection is not required once the app has been downloaded.

www.slovoed.com



My favourite French phrase

What is your favourite French word/phrase; perhaps something that has struck a chord or stayed in your memory?

'Comme ci comme ça'

Krystyna Semlekan via Facebook

Meaning 'so-so', 'comme ci comme ça' is used in a familiar sense. For example: "Tout s'est-il bien passé?" – "Comme ci comme ça." ("Did everything go well?" – "So-so")

If you have a handy tip for learning French, please let us know by emailing editorial@livingfrance.com or contact us on:

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The role of the pharmacy

For minor health worries, your first port of call should be your local pharmacy. **Alice Phillipott** shares the essential vocabulary you need, from cold symptoms to heartburn

Alain se sent malade depuis plusieurs jours. Ce matin il s'est réveillé avec **la gorge très irritée**. Avant d'aller au travail, il décide de s'arrêter à la pharmacie afin d'y obtenir des médicaments.

Alain: Bonjour!

Pharmacien: Bonjour monsieur, comment puis-je vous aider?

Alain: J'ai mal à la gorge depuis ce matin. Ca me fait très mal quand **j'avale** un aliment et donc je voudrais voir si vous avez quelque chose à me proposer pour me **soulager**.

Pharmacien: Très bien. Et vous n'avez pas d'autres symptômes?

Alain: Non, mais c'est très gênant.

Pharmacien: Alors, je vous propose deux produits différents. D'abord vous avez des pastilles au citron pour **le soulagement** des **maux de gorge**. Elles contiennent un agent anesthésiant qui va très rapidement **apaiser la douleur**.

Alain: D'accord. Combien faut-il en prendre chaque jour?

Pharmacien: Vous pourriez en prendre jusqu'à 6 pastilles par jour et au bout de trois jours, si vos symptômes persistent, je vous conseillerais de consulter votre médecin.

Alain: Entendu.

Pharmacien: Ensuite, j'ai un médicament homéopathique qui est très efficace pour le traitement des **enrouements**.

Alain: D'accord - et je peux prendre les deux traitements en même temps?

Pharmacien: Oui, tout à fait. Tenez, voici une boîte de 18 **comprimés**. Prenez un comprimé



à **sucer** jusqu'à 4 fois par jour. Je vous laisse passer à côté, ma collègue va vous encaisser.

Alain: D'accord, merci beaucoup.

Pharmacien: Je vous en prie. Bonne journée.

Isabelle s'inquiète pour sa fille, Léa, âgée de 14 mois. Depuis qu'elle l'a récupérée de la crèche ce soir, elle n'a pas cessé de pleurer. Passé 20 heures, Isabelle craint que toutes les pharmacies soient fermées. En cherchant sur internet, elle réussit bien heureusement à trouver **une pharmacie de garde** en ville.

Isabelle: Bonsoir!

Pharmacienne: Bonsoir madame, que puis-je pour vous?

Isabelle: Ma fille est inconsolable depuis environ une heure; je n'arrive pas à la calmer.

Je suis très inquiète.

Pharmacienne: Avez-vous remarqué d'autres symptômes?

Isabelle: Elle **manque d'appétit** aussi - elle **repousse** le biberon. Je ne sais pas ce qu'elle veut.

Pharmacienne: Elle a eu **un rhume** récemment?

Isabelle: Oui, elle s'est enrhumée à la crèche la semaine passée mais je pensais qu'elle **était guérie**.

Pharmacienne: OK, je vais voir si elle a de la température. Il me semble qu'elle ait **une otite**. Il ne faut pas vous faire trop de soucis - cette maladie touche beaucoup les enfants d'âge préscolaire car ils sont très sensibles.

Isabelle: D'accord. Dois-je l'emmener chez le médecin?

Pharmacienne: Oui. En attendant, je peux vous proposer un simple traitement pour **la douleur à l'oreille et la fièvre**. Ceci est un **antalgique** qui contient du paracétamol.

Isabelle: Parfait. Merci beaucoup de votre aide.

Pharmacienne: Au revoir.

Jean-Philippe souffre souvent des **brûlures d'estomac**, surtout le soir après avoir mangé. Cependant, il a constaté que ces sensations commencent à se produire plus régulièrement et donc il est allé voir son médecin. Cet après-midi il passe à la pharmacie locale afin de prendre son **ordonnance**.

Jean-Philippe: Bonjour!

Pharmacien: Bonjour monsieur Dupont, comment allez-vous?

Vocabulaire

- **La gorge très irritée**
A sore/enflamed throat
- **Avaler**
To swallow

● Soulager To relieve	● Lenrouement Hoarseness	● Le manque d'appétit Lack of appetite
● Le soulagement The relief/alleviation	● Un comprimé A pill/tablet	● Repousser To reject
● Les maux de gorge Throat pains	● Sucer To suck	● Un rhume A cold
● Apaiser la douleur To calm the pain	● Une pharmacie de garde Late-night pharmacy	● Etre guéri(e) To be cured/healed



Jean-Philippe: Je ne suis pas en forme en ce moment.

Pharmacien: Je suis désolé. Vous souffrez toujours des **remontées acides**?

Jean-Philippe: Oui, effectivement cela m'est devenu **insupportable** et aussi j'ai développé **une toux** qui m'empêche de dormir la nuit. Je suis venu pour prendre mon ordonnance.

Pharmacien: Pas de problème. Avez-vous votre **carte vitale**? Voilà, votre médicament contre les inflammations que vous devez prendre au milieu d'un repas. Ce traitement est destiné à réduire l'acidité et la douleur.

Jean-Philippe: Merci bien.

Pharmacien: Après, savez-vous qu'il y a certaines

mesures dans votre vie quotidienne que vous pouvez prendre pour diminuer la fréquence des renvois acides?

Jean-Philippe: A propos de mon **alimentation**? Oui j'en suis déjà au courant. J'ai éliminé les viandes épaisses et j'essaie aussi de réduire ma consommation d'alcool.

Pharmacien: C'est excellent. Tenez, je vous donne ce **dépliant** quand même, il vous indique comment vous pouvez éventuellement prévenir ce problème. Vous y trouverez quelques astuces et conseils utiles.

Jean-Philippe: Je vous remercie beaucoup. Au revoir.

Pharmacien: Bon courage! 

Test your French

Associez ces expressions idiomatiques aux équivalents en anglais.

1) *Ne pas se sentir dans son assiette*

2) *Avoir le cafard*

3) *Avoir un chat dans la gorge*

4) *Tomber dans les pommes*

5) *Avoir la tête qui tourne*

6) *Avoir une araignée au plafond*

a) *To have a frog in one's throat*

b) *To feel dizzy*

c) *To feel under the weather*

d) *To not be right in the head*

e) *To be depressed/down in the dumps*

f) *To faint*

• Une otite An ear infection/earache	• Les brûlures d'estomac (fpl) Heartburn	• Une toux A cough
• La douleur à l'oreille Pain in the ear	• Une ordonnance A prescription	• La carte vitale Health insurance card
• La fièvre Fever/high temperature	• Les remontées acides (fpl) To suffer from heartburn	• L'alimentation Diet/nutrition
• Un antalgique Analgesic/pain-killer	• Insupportable Unbearable	• Un dépliant A leaflet/flyer

Five minute French

Test your language skills and improve your vocabulary with these fun French games

LES MOTS CACHÉS

If the clue is in French, look for the English equivalent and vice versa. Theme: culinary terms



napkin

serveur

chair

poivre

bottle

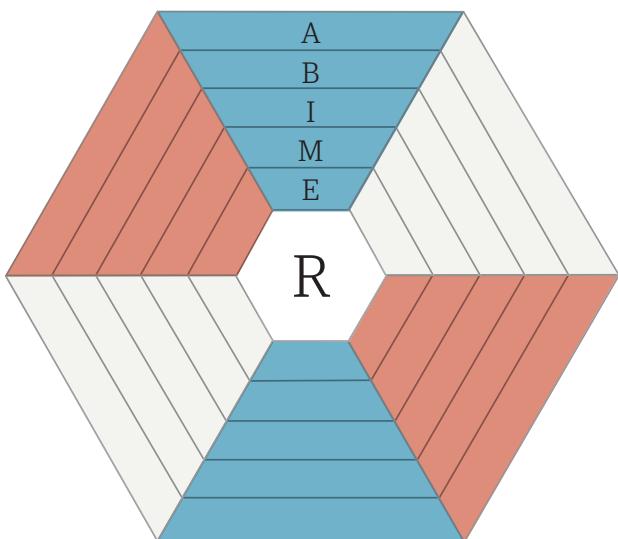
verre

fork

cuillère

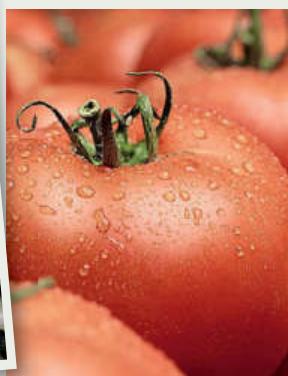
plate

L'Hexagone



Use the clues in English below to work out the 6 six-letter French verbs that all end in the letter 'R'. The first one has been done for you to show you how it's done.

- to damage (abîmer)
- to sleep
- to break
- to move
- to admit
- to enter



The perfect match

Match the picture to the correct word

poisson
viande
légumes

WHERE AM I?

Je suis... un département, je suis situé dans la région d'Aquitaine, à côté de la Charente, ma capitale est Périgueux. ♦

Je suis... une ville dans le département de Pas-de-Calais, je suis un port, on me connaît car je suis une gare maritime. ♦

Unscramble the letters to find four aquatic words

1 qnieur



2 eeinabl



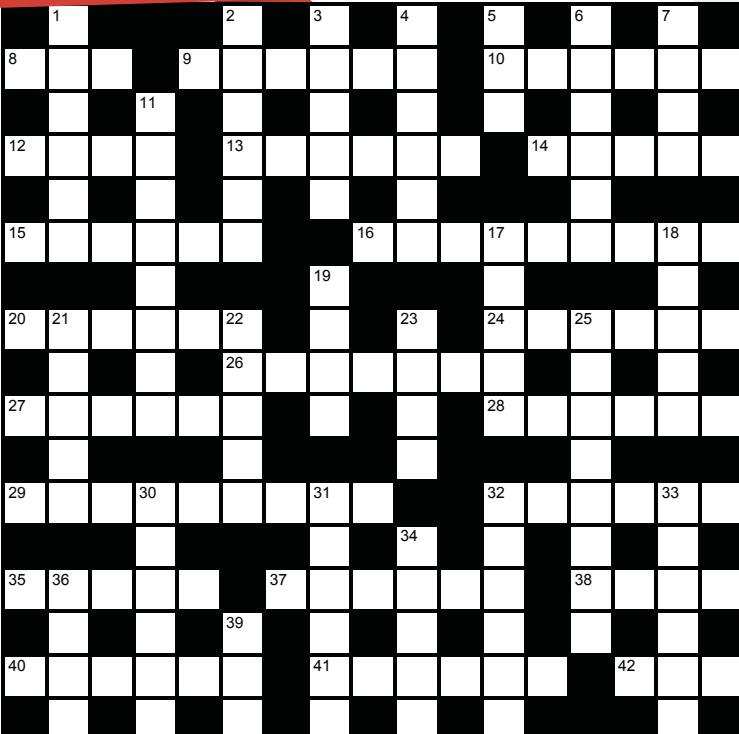
3 lasueg



4 nacoé



Crossword



Tongue twisters (les virelangues)

6



Qui sont ces six singes suisses?
Who are these six Swiss monkeys?

Across

- 8 shout, scream (3)
- 9 chair (6)
- 10 notebook, exercise book (6)
- 12 'he will have' - 'il ...' (4)
- 13 four (6)
- 14 before (5)
- 15 to put (6)
- 16 to rouse, to wake (someone) up (9)
- 19 helmet (i.e. crash helmet) (6)
- 20 flowers (6)
- 21 tournament, contest (7)
- 22 beyond (2-4)
- 23 nostril (6)
- 24 to be wounded, hurt oneself (2,7)
- 25 'crocodile tears' - '... de crocodile' (6)
- 26 screen, (5)
- 27 egg (4)
- 28 entertained, amused (5)
- 29 I was' - 'J...' (5)
- 30 eleven (4)
- 31 writer, author (8)
- 32 'teddy bear' - '... en peluche' (4)
- 33 unequal, mismatched (6)
- 34 arch, curve (3)

Down

- 1 proof (6)
- 2 each (6)
- 3 'I will read' - 'je ...' (5)
- 4 butter (6)
- 5 here (3)
- 6 horse (6)
- 7 kidney, back area (4)
- 11 watermelon (8)
- 17 finally, at last (5)
- 18 'I was' - 'J...' (5)
- 19 'I was' - 'J...' (5)
- 20 helmet (i.e. crash helmet) (6)
- 21 entertained, amused (5)
- 22 'I was' - 'J...' (5)
- 23 eleven (4)
- 24 flowers (6)
- 25 writer, author (8)
- 26 'crocodile tears' - '... de crocodile' (6)
- 27 screen, (5)
- 28 egg (4)
- 29 entertained, amused (5)
- 30 'crocodile tears' - '... de crocodile' (6)
- 31 to avoid (6)
- 32 salmon (6)
- 33 unequal, mismatched (6)
- 34 weather (5)
- 35 pear (5)
- 36 'teddy bear' - '... en peluche' (4)
- 37 bird (6)
- 38 idea (4)
- 39 arch, curve (3)

WIN!

a 12-month subscription
to *Living France*



Put your French to the test and complete this month's crossword to be in with a chance of winning a 12-month subscription to *Living France*. The closing date for entries is 20 Oct 2015.

ANSWERS TO THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE:

Across: 1 Osé, 3 Rocade, 6 Rouge, 10 Reçu, 11 Fumer, 12 Ouvert, 14 Ici, 15 Eau, 16 Fric, 17 Evier, 18 Langue, 20 Tirent, 21 Nourriture, 23 Sais, 25 Femme, 27 Onze, 31 Accueillir, 33 Ombres, 34 Levier, 36 Amené, 37 Irai, 39 Ils, 40 Une, 41 Serein, 42 Salir, 43 État, 44 Geler, 45 Espèce, 46 Ôté.
Down: 2 Soeur, 4 Combien de, 5 Durer, 7 Garou, 8 Guichets, 9 Foulard, 11 Fierté, 13 Vingt, 16 Fêtes, 19 Été, 22 Riz, 24 Arc, 26 Merveille, 27 Oubliées, 28 Essai, 29 Vitrine, 30 Jouer, 31 Ail, 32 Utile, 35 Ébène, 36 Assis, 38 Amant.

The winner of the August crossword is: Mr Ken Garrett

To enter our prize crossword competition, complete the grid and fill in your details in the coupon below, then send them by post to: *Living France Crossword Competition, Cumberland House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, GL50 1BB* quoting ref: CROSSLFOCT15

Name
Address

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On the map

Use our detailed map to help plan your route and understand France's departmental and regional boundaries

THE DEPARTMENTS

Each of France's 96 departments is listed below with the departmental capital, or préfecture, in brackets. The places indicated by this symbol  on the map opposite are the regional capitals.

01 Ain (Bourg-en-Bresse)	24 Dordogne (Périgueux)	50 Manche (St-Lô)	73 Savoie (Chambéry)
02 Aisne (Laon)	25 Doubs (Besançon)	51 Marne (Châlons-en-Champagne)	74 Haute-Savoie (Annecy)
03 Allier (Moulins)	26 Drôme (Valence)	52 Haute-Marne (Chaumont)	75 Ville-de-Paris (Paris)
04 Alpes-de-Haute-Provence (Digne)	27 Eure (Évreux)	53 Mayenne (Laval)	76 Seine-Maritime (Rouen)
05 Hautes-Alpes (Gap)	28 Eure-et-Loir (Chartres)	54 Meurthe-et-Moselle (Nancy)	77 Seine-et-Marne (Melun)
06 Alpes-Maritimes (Nice)	29 Finistère (Quimper)	55 Meuse (Bar-le-Duc)	78 Yvelines (Versailles)
07 Ardèche (Prives)	30 Gard (Nîmes)	56 Morbihan (Vannes)	79 Deux-Sèvres (Niort)
08 Ardennes (Charleville-Mézières)	31 Haute-Garonne (Toulouse)	57 Moselle (Metz)	80 Somme (Amiens)
09 Ariège (Foix)	32 Gers (Auch)	58 Nièvre (Nevers)	81 Tarn (Albi)
10 Aube (Troyes)	33 Gironde (Bordeaux)	59 Nord (Lille)	82 Tarn-et-Garonne (Montauban)
11 Aude (Carcassonne)	34 Hérault (Montpellier)	60 Oise (Beauvais)	83 Var (Toulon)
12 Aveyron (Rodez)	35 Ille-et-Vilaine (Rennes)	61 Orne (Alençon)	84 Vaucluse (Avignon)
13 Bouches-du-Rhône (Marseille)	36 Indre (Châteauroux)	62 Pas-de-Calais (Arras)	85 Vendée (La Roche-sur-Yon)
14 Calvados (Caen)	37 Indre-et-Loire (Tours)	63 Puy-de-Dôme (Clermont-Ferrand)	86 Vienne (Poitiers)
15 Cantal (Aurillac)	38 Isère (Grenoble)	64 Pyrénées-Atlantiques (Pau)	87 Haute-Vienne (Limoges)
16 Charente (Angoulême)	39 Jura (Lons-le-Saunier)	65 Hautes-Pyrénées (Tarbes)	88 Vosges (Épinal)
17 Charente-Maritime (La Rochelle)	40 Landes (Mont-de-Marsan)	66 Pyrénées-Orientales (Perpignan)	89 Yonne (Auxerre)
18 Cher (Bourges)	41 Loir-et-Cher (Blois)	67 Bas-Rhin (Strasbourg)	90 Territoire-de-Belfort (Belfort)
19 Corrèze (Tulle)	42 Loire (St-Étienne)	68 Haut-Rhin (Colmar)	91 Essonne (Évry)
2a Corse-du-Sud (Ajaccio)	43 Haute-Loire (Le Puy)	69 Rhône (Lyon)	92 Hauts-de-Seine (Nanterre)
2b Haute-Corse (Bastia)	44 Loire-Atlantique (Nantes)	70 Haute-Saône (Vesoul)	93 Seine-St-Denis (Bobigny)
21 Côte-d'Or (Dijon)	45 Loiret (Orléans)	71 Saône-et-Loire (Mâcon)	94 Val-de-Marne (Créteil)
22 Côtes-d'Armor (St-Brieuc)	46 Lot (Cahors)	72 Sarthe (Le Mans)	95 Val-d'Oise (Pontoise)
23 Creuse (Guéret)	47 Lot-et-Garonne (Agen)		
	48 Lozère (Mende)		
	49 Maine-et-Loire (Angers)		

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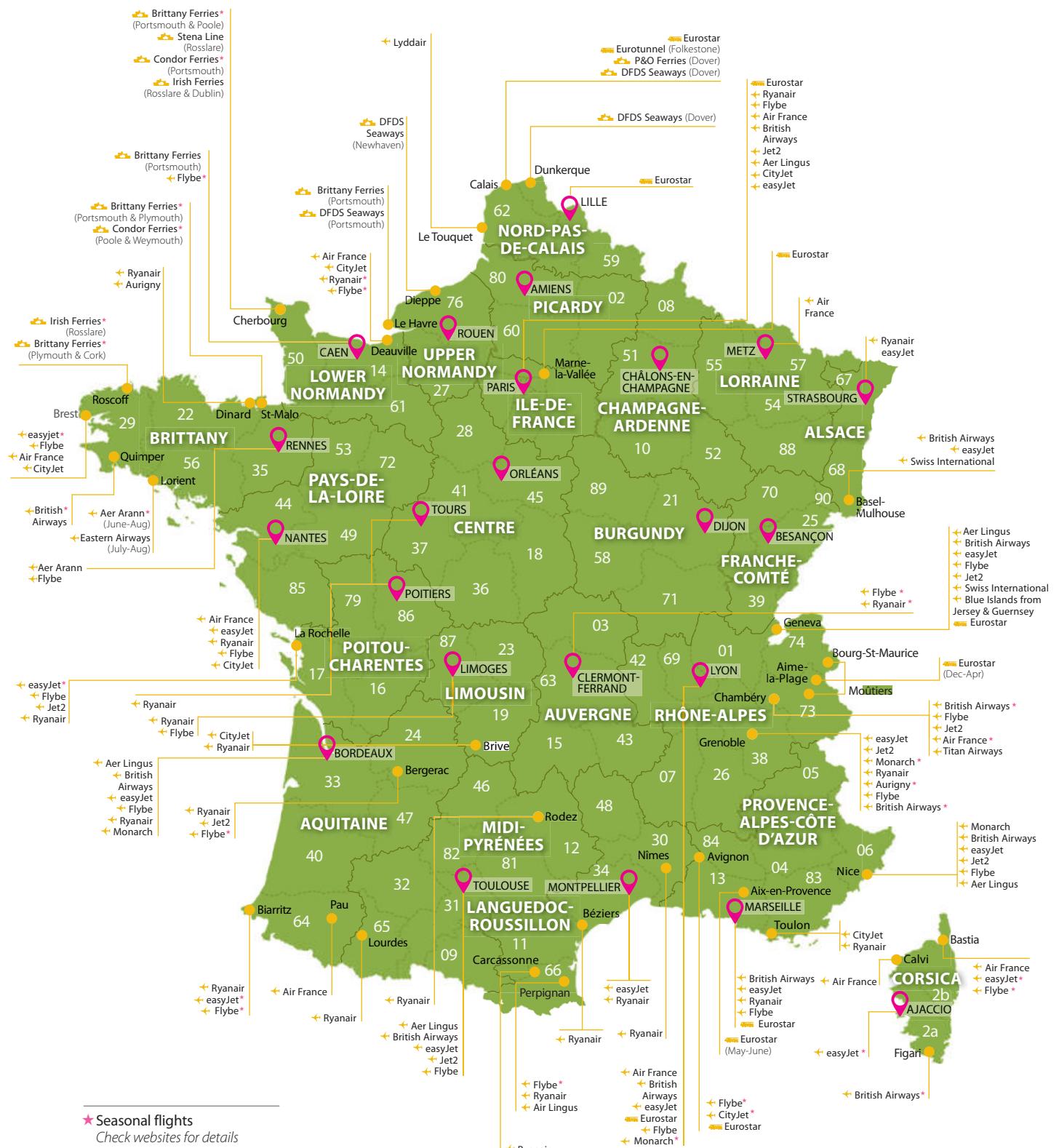
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F		C				B			
O	W	H				O			
U		A	A			U			
R		I				T			
C		S	T			E			
H	S	E	E			I			
E	P	E	P	P	E	R	G	L	A
T	O					L			
T	O					E			
E	N								
	S	E	R	V	I	E	T	T	E

L'HEXAGONE

1. abîmer
2. dormir
3. casser
4. bouger
5. avouer
6. entrer

THE PERFECT MATCH

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viande = meat
légumes = vegetables

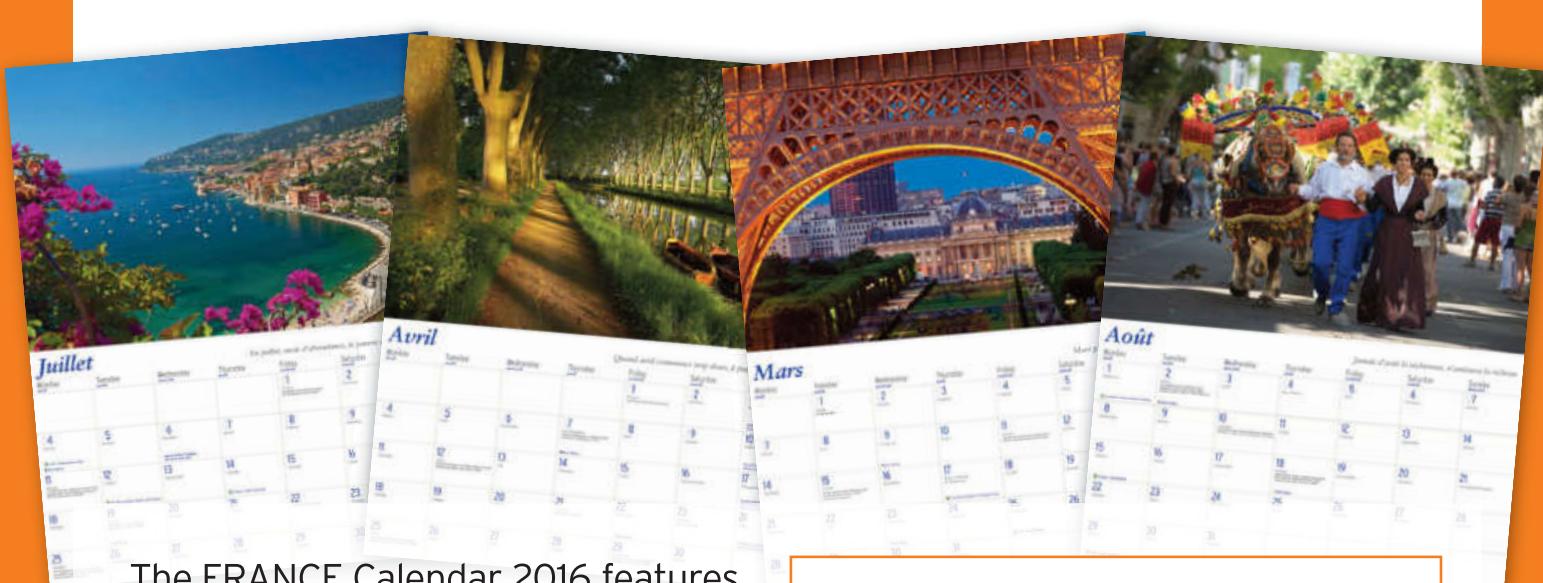
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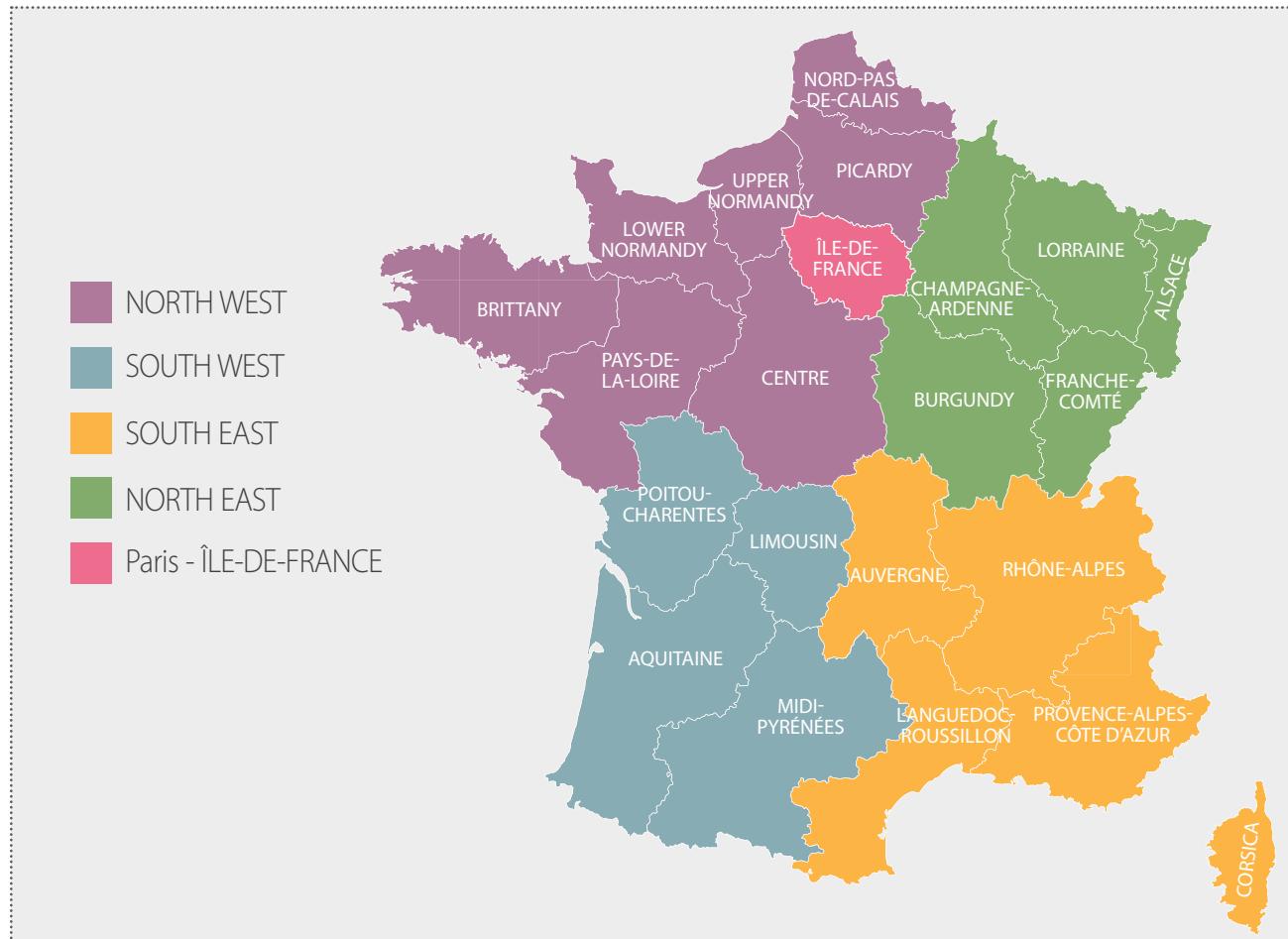
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Property directory

Properties for sale, properties to let, services for your French home



Whether you're looking for a renovation project, the perfect holiday bolt-hole or that château you've always dreamed of, *Living France's* Property Directory should be the first place to look. With properties and agents covering most of France, you're sure to find something that catches your eye. To help you hit the ground running, we've put together a back-to-basics guide to buying a French property. *Bonne chance!*

BUYING PROPERTY

- **Vendor and buyer** agree on the price and terms of contract, including any conditional clauses (*clauses suspensives*) and any furniture included in the sale.

- **If it's a private sale**, it is unwise to rely on the vendor to supply accurate answers to all questions. Some information is best obtained from the local town hall; for other queries, consult the relevant authorities or call in an expert.

- **Agent's fees** (*les frais d'agence*) are usually included in the price and as such, paid by the buyer. Check this is the case. The *notaire's* fixed fees plus tax (*les frais de notaire*) are

also usually paid by the buyer and are on top of the purchase price. When buying privately, there will be no agent's fees but *notaire's* fees will still apply.

- **The preliminary sales contract** (*compromis de vente*) is drawn up by the agent or *notaire* and signed by both parties. If the buyer is buying privately from a vendor, it's the *notaire* who draws up the contract.

- **The buyer pays the deposit** (usually 5-10% of the purchase price) to the *notaire* and a seven-day cooling off period ensues, during which the buyer can withdraw (but the vendor cannot) and after which the

contract is legally binding. If the buyer pulls out after this, he forfeits his deposit.

- **If you are going to buy with a mortgage**, now is the time to put in your application. However, it is wise to apply for a mortgage in principle before you start your property hunt, to avoid disappointment later.

- **If you are taking out a mortgage**, this will be a condition of the preliminary sales contract, giving you the possibility of pulling out should your application be turned down. Once the offer is official, it will be confirmed to the *notaire* and the contract becomes unconditional. 

- The *notaire* handles the conveyancing, which typically takes two to three months. When all the paperwork is ready, the *notaire* confirms the date and time of the signing of the *acte de vente*.

- Reports on lead, asbestos and flood zones (and in some areas, termites) are mandatory; the vendor pays for these. An energy-efficiency report (known as a DPE, or *diagnostic de performance énergétique*) is now also mandatory, while a natural disaster risk report (*état des risques naturels et technologiques*) has to be provided in addition. It specifies whether the property is within an area where there is a risk of flooding or other natural or technological disaster or accident.

- The property has to be insured in the buyer's name from the date of completion.

- The buyer transfers the balance of payment to the *notaire* prior to completion. On the day of completion, all parties meet the *notaire* to sign the contract (the buyer can appoint a proxy). Keys and an *attestation de vente* are handed over and ownership is transferred. The final *acte de vente* papers are sent out around six months later.

LAND & BUSINESS

- Before buying a plot of land you should check the *limite de la zone constructible* - even if the plot is large, you might only be permitted to construct on a limited part of it. The *plan local d'urbanisme* (PLU) is available at the *mairie* and will tell you what size property can be constructed on the plot. The PLU will also state whether the plot is a *terrain de loisirs*, which means that you cannot build on the land.

- Buying a business follows much the same procedure as buying property with the added factor of goodwill, or *fonds de commerce*. The local chamber of commerce can offer advice as well as statistics to verify a business's potential profitability. Make sure that the business is legitimate and properly registered by checking its SIREN or SIRET number. Seek professional accountancy and legal advice before proceeding with the sale.

DOS & DON'TS

Dos

- Do check the records of the property and land before making an offer; be clear about boundaries, rights of way and access.



✓ Do take legal advice on inheritance law.

✓ Do view the property on the day of completion before signing the *acte de vente*, which specifies that the purchase is 'sold as seen'.

✓ Do prepare any personal assets you intend to use for the purchase (eg give notice for any savings to withdraw, sell securities, etc).

✓ Do shop around in advance for the best currency exchange rate deals.

✓ Do remember to open a French bank account and make your mortgage application in good time.

✓ Do visit the Notaires de France website. It has lots of helpful information in English. www.notaires.fr

Don'ts

✗ Don't be tempted to sign a sales contract unless you are sure; once the cooling-off period is over, it is legally binding and if you pull out you will lose your deposit.

✗ Don't forget that the *notaire* will make a charge of 6.5-10% in addition to the purchase price (this amount is different for new builds). The cheaper the property, the higher the percentage charged; this amount consists of the *notaire*'s fixed fees and tax.

✗ Don't forget to allow for the expense of an interpreter being present if your French language skills are poor; ask your agent or *notaire* about this, as they may be able to help.

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Gironde **€245,000**

Ref: 56361 Located in a lively village on the Dordogne river is this super 3 bed house in need of a makeover.



Lot **€650,000**

Ref: 56126 This 5 bed / 4 bath stone property sits in 8Ha of land, has amazing views and a swimming pool.



Cotes d'Armor **€194,400**

Ref: 56177 Spacious family home in centre of lively village. Mains drains, 5 beds & attached garden.



Dordogne **€1,050,000**

Ref: 55519 Restoration of high quality preserving the charm of this substantial property. Situated in 25 acres of meadow and forest.



Calvados **€424,000**

Ref: 35063 Detached stone farmhouse set in pastureland with stabling & outbuildings. Ideal B&B.



Gard **€799,950**

Ref: 51292 6 bed architect designed house in Cévennes foothills. Set in 23.6 acres of farmland with stables.



Charente Maritime **€299,600**

Ref: 55945 4 bed detached property comprising heat pump, pool, pond and terrace, close to Aulnay.



Gironde **€1,995,000**

Ref: 52942 Pleasure vineyard set on 2.3Ha of AOC Fronsac. Close to St Emilion and B&B business.



Haute Savoie **€399,000**

Ref: 55451 8 bed auberge business opportunity near the Portes du Soleil, Grand Massif and Praz de Lys.



Dordogne **€125,350**

Ref: 55739 Stone 3 bed house in need of modernisation. Set in 1400m2 of garden and close to Sarlat.



Morbihan **€202,500**

Ref: 45341 3 bed / 1 bath longere walking distance to the village. Big garden with summerhouse and well.



St Remy **€2,940,000**

Ref: 54334 Contemporary house with pool, 4.2Ha of land, outbuildings and an equestrian centre.



Dordogne **€304,500**

Ref: 54821 Cute little 2 bed stone house with pool, set in one acre of land with lovely views.



Tarn **€615,000**

Ref: 55938 5 bed character home comprising 6 beds, 6945m2 garden, gite, pool 7 outbuildings.



Cher **€85,800**

Ref: 55993 Perfect holiday home with 300m2 garden, 3 beds and open plan layout.



Saint Tropez **€17,510,000**

Ref: 50994 Luxury 6 bed / 6 bath villa in the exclusive Les Parcs de Saint Tropez. Pool and tennis.



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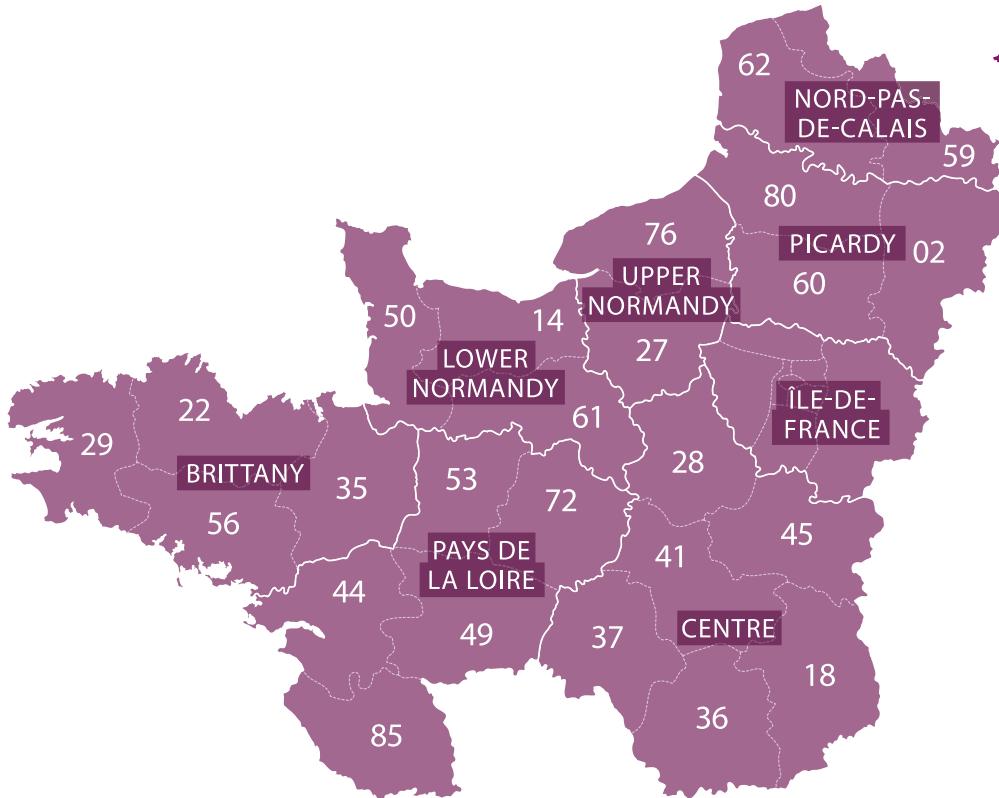
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PROPERTY FOR SALE

NORTH WEST



BRITTANY

Côtes-d'Armor (22) • Finistère (29)

• Ille-et-Vilaine (35) • Morbihan (56)

Brittany has 1,700 miles of coastline that changes from the warm tones of the pink granite coast to the dramatically hewn rocks of Finistère and the long expanses of sandy beaches in the south. Well-worn granite stone cottages bedecked with blue shutters huddle together in clusters of hamlets; elsewhere half-timbered houses lean against each other in well-preserved towns. A unique history and strong regional pride give this area a character all of its own, with local festivals, gastronomic specialities and the Breton language still thriving today.

CENTRE

Cher (18) • Eure-et-Loir (28) • Indre (36)

• Indre-et-Loire (37) • Loir-et-Cher (41)

• Loiret (45)

Centre-Val-de-Loire, often referred to simply as Centre, is home to elegant Loire-Valley châteaux, fine wines and rolling fertile countryside. With the River Loire cutting through the region, said to demarcate the more temperate south with the cooler north, the region is known for its bountiful produce as well as its unspoilt towns and cities. Tours and Orléans are frequently cited as great places to live in media surveys and the majestic

cathedrals of Bourges and Chartres are known the world over.

NORMANDY

Calvados (14) • Eure (27) • Manche (50)

• Orne (61) • Seine Maritime (76)

Normandy, divided administratively into upper and lower Normandy, benefits from both coast and countryside and is rich in heritage and history. The interior boasts traditional thatched cottages, half-timbered farmsteads and the bocage or pastureland that produces creamy Camembert; the coastline takes in the D-Day beaches and long expanses of sandy beaches perfect for families.

PAYS-DE-LA-LOIRE

Loire-Atlantique (44) • Maine-et-Loire (49)

• Mayenne (53) • Sarthe (72) • Vendée (85)

Pays-de-la-Loire, unsurprisingly, has the River Loire running through it as well as several of its important tributaries. The landscapes vary throughout the region from the flat open stretches of the coastal Vendée to the quiet rural department of Mayenne; from troglodyte caves to lush valleys and peaceful woodland. The area's vineyards produce Muscadet wines and Rosé d'Anjou and the regional capital, Nantes, is a dynamic and vibrant centre.

NORD-PAS-DE-CALAIS

Nord (59) • Pas-de-Calais (62)

Nord-Pas-de-Calais is the closest French region to the UK. Served by the Channel Tunnel as well as ferry ports, it's easy to get to and offers clean beaches, gently rolling valleys and pretty villages – in spite of being derided for being industrialised.

PICARDY

Aisne (02) • Oise (60) • Somme (80)

Picardy borders Ile-de-France, Champagne-Ardenne and Normandy and so enjoys influences from all three. Essentially flat, the area is home to the former hunting woods of past French kings and is rich in architecture and history, primarily from the First and Second World Wars.

ILE-DE-FRANCE

Paris (75) • Essonne (91) • Hauts-de-Seine (92) •

Seine-Saint-Denis (93) • Seine-et-Marne (77) •

Val-de-Marne (94) • Val-d'Oise (95) • Yvelines (78)

Ile-de-France is thought of largely as being just Paris; however, the hinterland departments offer a less built up option, yet still benefit from being within easy distance of the capital.

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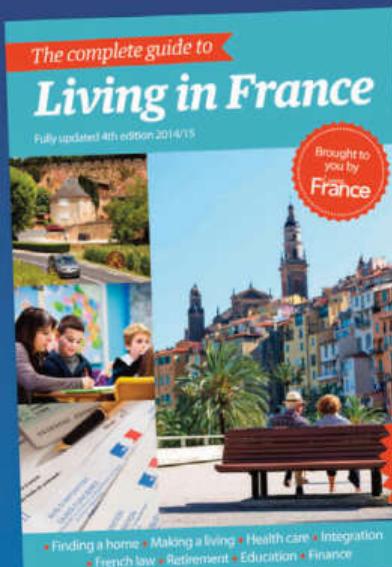
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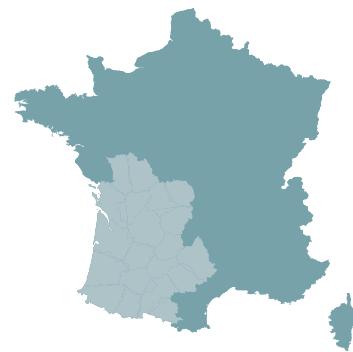
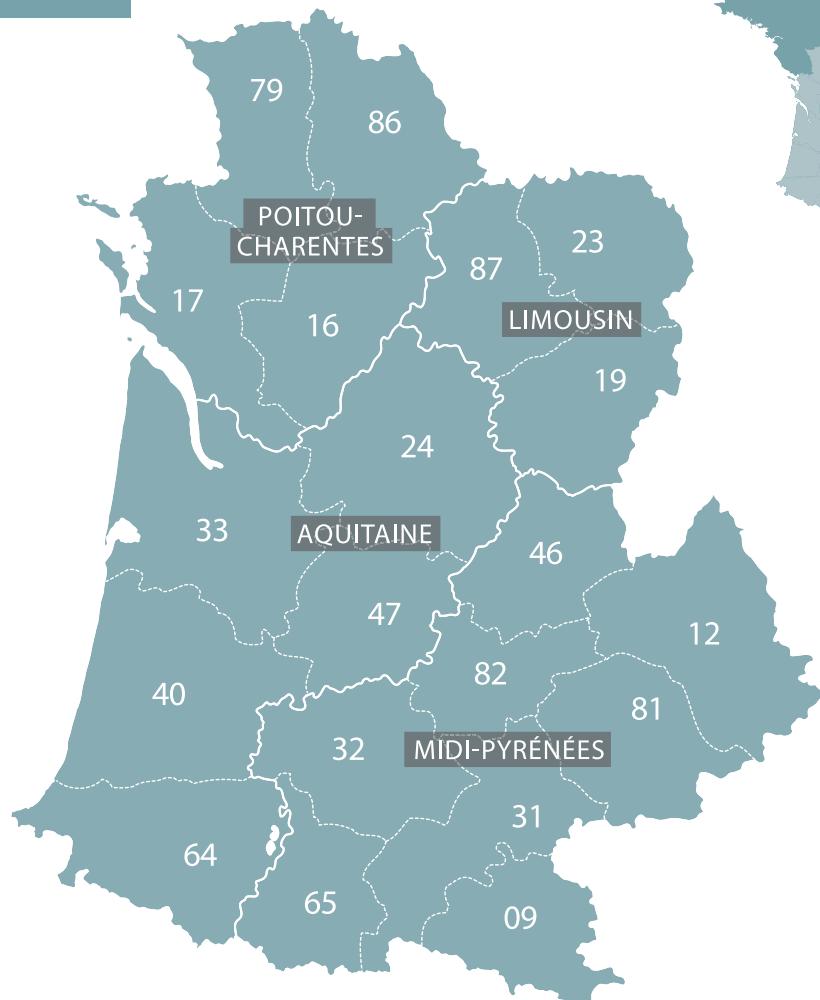
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SOUTH WEST



POITOU-CHARENTES

Charente (16) • Charente-Maritime (17)

• Deux-Sèvres (79) • Vienne (86)

Deux-Sèvres and the three other departments which form Poitou-Charentes are almost completely unspoiled with virtually no industry, making the region one of the most tranquil in France. The long Atlantic coast here is lined with long, windswept, sandy beaches and is both an ideal summer holiday destination and an invigorating place to move to permanently. Inland, the landscape is undulating or flat, and the land is used for mixed farming and livestock breeding, as well as for vineyards and apple orchards. Property prices on the coast are higher than those inland, but the region enjoys a good road network, making it possible to live inland and travel to the beach for the day.

AQUITAINE

Dordogne (24) • Gironde (33) • Landes (40)

• Lot-et-Garonne (47) • Pyrénées-Atlantiques (64)

Aquitaine is one of the most varied regions of France. Largely agricultural, crops include corn and chili peppers, which are hung from the window ledges and beams of

houses to dry. To the north of the region is a natural inland sea, the Bassin d'Arcachon, where 90 per cent of France's oysters are grown. In the centre, Landes is covered almost entirely with pine trees, creating purportedly the largest forest in Europe. The trees are used to make paper. The architecture is as varied as the landscape with the stone coastal villas of the north giving way to half-timbered homes inland and on to the Basque Country's pretty white stone houses with their red timbers and shutters.

LIMOUSIN

Corrèze (19) • Creuse (23) • Haute-Vienne (87)

Limousin is sparsely populated, predominantly agricultural and with very little heavy industry. Located in the foothills of the Massif Central, the region is characterised by rolling hills and verdant valleys. Its mountains and forests coupled with the many lakes, rivers and streams that flow into either the rivers Loire or the Garonne make the region a holiday home paradise that is becoming increasingly popular with those looking to make France their permanent home. Aside from the scenic countryside, the area has many attractive towns

and villages and being south of the River Loire, the weather is generally better than in the north but not as hot as the south.

MIDI-PYRÉNÉES

Ariège (09) • Aveyron (12) • Haute-Garonne (31)

• Gers (32) • Lot (46) • Hautes-Pyrénées (65)

• Tarn (81) • Tarn-et-Garonne (82)

France's largest region, Midi-Pyrénées is renowned for its stunning, unspoilt scenery which ranges from the majestic mountains of the Pyrenees in the south to the peaceful green serenity of the valleys in Aveyron, Lot and Haute-Garonne. As one of France's prime food producing regions, it is the home of several notable French classics: cassoulet, magret de canard, and foie gras to name three, not to mention Roquefort cheese and armagnac; perfect for warming the cockles on cold winter evenings. The people of the region are known for the warmth of their welcome, and their love of food and drink.

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Ref: 12668

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Much loved family home, Charente

Historic 17th century 'Logis' 3 large double bedrooms, 4 receptions, set in walled gardens of 5503m², in a pretty village. Potential for further development in the ancient tower and attached barns.

Ref: 12457

€424 000



Picture perfect, Charente Maritime

Beautiful stone, 5/6 bedroom farmhouse with pool, set along a quiet country lane. Renovated to a high standard. Easily maintained, mature garden.

Ref: 12517

€318 000



Unbeatable value, Charente Maritime

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Manche, Normandy

One of the most striking features of this property are the beautifully planned and maintained gardens which provide lots of interest throughout the year and different terraces and seating areas to enjoy it. Renovation works were carried out in 1996.

171,000 €



Finistère, Brittany

Nice house near town centre. Basement : garage for 2 cars, boiler room, laundry, one bedroom with toilets. Ground floor: kitchen equipped, living room, 2 bedrooms, shower room, toilets. Large terrace. Garden flowery (992m²). Living space : around 95m². Central heating: Oil.

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Mayenne, Pays de la Loire

Impressive south-facing village house, recently renovated and providing a comfortable two bedroom house with attractive large kitchen/living room. Enclosed garden (243m²) with sun terrace, mature planting, lawn and garden shed/workshop. Separate garage.

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Deux-Sèvres, Poitou-Charentes

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Lot, Midi-Pyrénées

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Lot, Midi-Pyrénées

Old house with outbuildings on a landscaped parc with swimming pool, ponds and river. 2.5 hectares of land. Ground level: living room 50m² with kitchen and fire place. Level 1: 2 bedrooms opening on a balcony, bathroom. Level 2: 2 bedrooms, shower room. Facing south.

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- In most parts of France your holiday accommodation will be obliged to levy a tourist tax (*taxe de séjour*) on all overnight stays. Check whether this is included in the advertised price. Prices vary depending on area.
- If you agree to a booking of a month or more it is advisable to have a formal French tenancy agreement (*contrat de location*), and most owners will want to do so.
- For a long term let you will need to supply the agent (or private individual) with important information including evidence of solvency and proof of identity.
- Like most long term lets in the UK, tenants must have a guarantor (*garant*)
- Initial costs can be up to as much as three months' rent; including agency fees (*française d'agence*); deposit (*une caution*) and the first month's rent.
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Wearing rosé-tinted spectacles

They love a celebration in *Ian Moore's* corner of France, but he's eager to put summer behind him so he can give his poor liver a rest

Well, thank goodness that's over. The pool has been '*hivernage-d*', the well pump removed for the winter, garden furniture safely rehoused and hefty knitwear demothballed; at last summer is finally over. I realise that celebrating the end of long, warm days, outdoor eating and sun-baked restfulness seems somewhat churlish, but I have my reasons: namely I need to dry out.

It is a little known fact but French law stipulates that any gathering of more than three people cannot break up without a *feu d'artifice* firework display - any gathering at all. Well they seemed to have added an amendment to this law: the *verre de l'amitié*. The direct translation is 'glass of friendship', but what it really means is: 'Tuck in folks,

we've bought a shed load of rosé.' So now, at any formal, informal, social or civic get-together, not only will you be deafened by assorted fireworks, you'll end up sozzled in the process.

I mean, don't get me wrong, 'a glass of friendship' is a wonderful thing, most convivial in fact in the summer months, and I can honestly say that new friendships have been made while under the influence of the grape, but there's no respite. One of my sons won a prize in a spelling competition; he came eighth in the whole department and, puffed with pride, we arrived for the prize-giving ceremony, an hour's drive away. The French take these things very seriously and on the stage were assorted dignitaries all lined up to give speeches.

The speeches, four of them, rightly

centred on the theme of education and its importance and so on, but then the prizes were dished out with what bordered on unseemly haste. The last speech had made mention of the said *verre de l'amitié* and everybody's mind was now set on that. The dignitaries had clearly all worked up a thirst, and the prospect of a local rosé to re-wet the whistle was just too enticing. Think of a similar ceremony in the UK with someone rushing in to say that the 'pubs shut in ten minutes': it had that effect.

We popped by the local football club to say goodbye to one of the coaches, who has decided to hang up his boots. He made a lovely speech but behind him you could clearly hear the uncorking of wine bottles and so again people's attention wavered. The next day, we signed in at a new football club and I

We want to fit in - if that means taking the rosé bullet, then so be it

was offered a glass of rosé in celebration.

It seems that from about the end of June until early October, you cannot move in rural France without someone suddenly producing a jerrycan drum and thrusting a plastic goblet of rosé at you. To paraphrase Eddie Izzard: "You're leaving the football club? Rosé! You're joining the football club? Rosé! You're in a queue at the *boulangerie*? Rosé!"

Personally, I love the stuff. My favourite is from the Var area in the south and it's called *Les Tourettes*; childish I know, but if you quaff enough of the stuff, it does exactly what it says on the label. I'm not a rosé expert you understand; just, because of its ubiquity in the summer months, something of an addict.

And you don't feel you can say no either. We want to fit in with local customs as much as we possibly can, be part of the community; well if that means taking the rosé bullet almost every time I go out, then so be it. We all have to make sacrifices but really, there is a limit. We shouldn't need a designated driver for a spelling competition ceremony!

So, like I say, roll on the non-rosé winter months, and the chance for my liver to rest; summer is finally over and I'm celebrating the fact. Actually, I may just raise a glass to its passing... **LF**



Ian Moore is a comedian, writer, chutney-maker and mod who lives with his family in the Loire Valley. His latest book is *C'est Modnifique!* (£8.99, Summersdale Publishers). www.ianmoore.info



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